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LIBERAL CHRISTIANITY

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LIBERAL CHRISTIANITY

BY

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CHAPTER I

ITS OUTWARD MARKS

LIBERAL Christianity is a fact and a force in the religion of the present time. It is a fact so plain and with implications so serious that it must be reckoned with; a force too potent to be ignored. No better proof could be asked of its significance and power than the attention given it by those who fear it, the attacks made upon it by those who would keep religion unchanged through the changing centuries, a closed ark carried along amid the advancing host of humanity, bearing sacred relics of a dead past. It is feared because it is real, and because it is pregnant with mighty changes. There is always a large number to whom any change means degeneration.

But it is feared, also, by some good people because it is not understood, and lies open to serious misconstruction. Many devout souls in the Church of Christ today shudder at any person or idea bearing the name of "liberal," as they would at a disease germ; people who, if they knew the truth about liberal Christianity, would thank God and take courage that such a movement is gaining

ground and that such views are winning a hearing. It is unfortunate that there is no thoroughly satisfactory name by which to denote liberal Christians. The word "liberal" is by far too wide-ranging, too open to widely different interpretations; it is applied not only to theological and ecclesiastical views, but to political and economic; to some it savors of radicalism, even of Bolshevism. It is eagerly claimed by men and movements away at the other end of the line from orthodox Christianity. Although it is thus an unfortunate name, yet it is not easy to find a better. "Modernist" has its own faults and disadvantages. There is a suggestion in it of a temporary style or fashion of thought. "Progressive" is also open to serious objections. There is no name which really fits and does full justice to the liberal evangelical Christian.

This fact reflects the general situation. Liberal Christianity is vaguely and slightly understood. Liberals have been poor apologists for their own cause. That fact is not by any means wholly to their discredit. It springs in large part from the fact that liberal evangelical Christians have been busier with religion than with propaganda for their own views of it, more interested in common Christianity than in any special phase of it, even their own. But the whole Church, and the whole religious world, it must be admitted, would be in a more wholesome state of clear-mindedness, were the real positions, meanings, beliefs and ends of liberal evangelical Christianity made very definite in the public mind.

For, while liberals have been neglectful of their duties as apologists, their opponents and critics have missed

no opportunity to impress upon the American people generally, and especially upon the people of the Churches, the worst possible interpretation of liberalism. Liberal Christianity has been held up to dishonor, scorn and reprobation; has been twisted, distorted, misrepresented; until numbers of sincere souls throughout the Churches think that everyone who in any sense calls himself a "liberal," or has that label applied to him by others, is at heart an enemy of the Christian faith, an unbeliever or dishonest in his use of words, interested in Christianity only as a useful cloak, one in his real point of view with Huxley or Spencer, or even one in mind and purpose with Thomas Paine or Nietzsche.

This misrepresentation of liberal Christianity has even gone so far as to deny to liberals the right to be considered Christians at all. A professor in one of the oldest and best known theological schools in America has published a book entitled, *Christianity and Liberalism*, in which he seriously maintains that liberal Christians are in fact not Christians at all, but representatives of a new religion, not only different from, but "diametrically opposite to," real Christianity. This startling judgment he supports by a very simple process, which has often proved useful in similar circumstances, the process of arbitrary definition. First he defines Christianity as essentially synonymous with his own point of view; then he defines liberalism as essentially synonymous with the views of extreme Unitarians, or even of agnostics and materialists; then he assumes that his definition is a fair description of every person and thing that can be called "liberal." It is easy thereafter to show that Christianity and liberalism so defined are in-

compatible, and to cry, "If the Lord be God, follow Him; but if Baal, then follow him!" If you will take Baal to be the Baal that he has made by definition, there is an end to liberalism in the Christian Church. It goes out, with the dogs and the other abominations.

If liberalism were in truth what Professor Machen says it is, his attacks upon it would have ample justification. But his book can be saved from condemnation as false witness only by a plea of crass ignorance. Either he does not know the facts about the modern liberal movement in the Church, or he misstates the facts he knows.

This is a serious charge I am making. But it is abundantly sustained by the amazing character of his statements, such as the following, all taken from the book mentioned:—

> "Modern liberalism not only is a different religion from Christianity, but belongs in a totally different class of religions" (page 7).
>
> "The liberal doctrines of the universal fatherhood of God and the universal brotherhood of man are contrary to the doctrines of the Christian religion" (page 18).
>
> "The Church of Rome may represent a perversion of the Christian religion; but naturalistic liberalism is not Christianity at all" (page 52).

Elsewhere he states that all liberalism is essentially naturalistic.

> "The chief modern rival of Christianity is 'liberalism'" (page 53).

"An examination of the teachings of liberalism in comparison with those of Christianity will show that at every point the two movements are in direct opposition" (page 53).

"According to the Bible, man is a sinner under the just condemnation of God; according to modern liberalism, there is really no such thing as sin."

"The modern liberal rejects not only the doctrine of plenary inspiration, but even such respect for the Bible as would be proper over against any ordinarily trustworthy book" (page 76).

"Christians stand in a religious relation to Jesus; liberals do not stand in a religious relation to Jesus" (page 85).

"Miracles are rejected by the modern liberal Church and with the miracles the entirety of the supernatural Person of our Lord. Not some miracles are rejected, but all" (page 107).

"The deity of our Lord, in any real sense of the word 'deity', is of course denied by modern liberalism" (page 112).

"The Grace of God is rejected by modern liberalism" (page 144).

"The liberal believes that applied Christianity is all there is of Christianity" (page 155).

"The greatest menace to the Christian Church today comes . . . from the presence within the Church of a type of faith and practice that is anti-Christian to the core" (page 160).

"One thing is perfectly plain—whether or no liberals are Christians, it is at any rate perfectly clear that liberalism is not Christianity" (page 160).

> "The Christian man discovers to his consternation that the agencies of the Church are propagating not only the gospel, but also a type of religious teaching which is at every conceivable point the diametrical opposite of the Gospel" (page 177).

I have quoted at great length to avoid any implication of unfairness.

It might be sufficient to let such words alone, to fall by their own weight of misstatement and prejudice. Nothing can be plainer than the fact that this professor first concocted in his study a fearsome wraith he calls "liberalism," and then proceeded against it with all his energy. If liberalism were what he says it is, then he ought to fight it to the bitter end. In that case, however, most of those whom he labels "liberals" would fight on his side against the deadly and pernicious thing. But, one after another, we meet his assertions as to what liberal Christianity is with the simple statement: "That is not so." And, for his view as a whole, we can only echo the exclamation called forth from the heart of one of our most brilliant and honored leaders of theological thought: "Jesus marveled at the faith of the centurion. What would He do at the naive credulity of this Princeton Professor?" (*Christian Ways of Salvation,* page 220).

Over against this opinion, assiduously and passionately cultivated by a group of determined propagandists, and thus imposed upon many sincere, misguided souls, that there is and can be no liberal Christianity, because liberalism and Christianity are mutually exclusive, I maintain with deep assurance and joy that liberal Chris-

tianity is a legitimate and important part or phase of the development of Christian doctrine and practice; that it is as worthy of confidence and respect as are other well-known phases of religious experience today; that it is essentially in harmony with the New Testament; that the Church would be seriously impoverished if it should disappear; indeed, that at present, more than any other particular phase of Christianity, liberal Christianity is the religious hope of the world.

What is liberal Christianity? I can answer only as a witness, not as an authority. What I say will inevitably be tinged with my own thinking and spiritual experiences. The full-rounded answer must come from many men of varying kinds. Yet I believe there is a real unity of thought and feeling and spirit among liberal Christians in the evangelical Churches, and that I may not wholly, or even in the main, misrepresent them when I try to say what it means to me to be a liberal in the Church of Christ today.

The word "liberal" is commonly used in two senses, one of them more precise, the other more loose or inclusive. The one relates to the views one holds, the general attitude he adopts toward truth. The other relates to the way one holds his views, his attitude toward ecclesiastical processes and relationships, and toward those who share with him the fellowship of the Church. It may minister to clearness if we first think of the liberal in his general attitude toward truth, and then, in the second, the ecclesiastical sense. In the second chapter I shall want to go to the heart of the matter, asking what is the essential message of liberal Christianity, its good news, its Gospel.

First, then, having regard to the way the Christian looks at truth, what distinguishes the liberal from other Christian men and groups? Three main characteristics appear: The liberal Christian accepts the scientific method; he is chiefly concerned with vital present spiritual experience; and he believes in the unity of spiritual experience.

I. *The liberal Christian believes in a thoroughgoing and confident use of the scientific method of determining what is fact.*

He is absolutely and utterly opposed to all obscurantism, to all dogmatism that would set bounds to the free spirit of man as it seeks to know all that can be known. He is not content grudgingly to give place to modern science; he welcomes it gladly as a servant of the glory of God and of the good of man. Since every day, all through his life, he uses the fruits of scientific study and finds them good, how can he reject or distrust the tree that bears such fruit? What a strange incongruity in the use of radio by fundamentalists to broadcast their opposition to science!

The liberal Christian is eager for the extension of the use of the scientific method to all subjects and every field. He views it not as an enemy, slowly encroaching upon the domain of God and the soul, but as a noble, strong ally and comrade. To him nothing is more pathetic in its futility or more mistaken in its aim and spirit than the frantic efforts of successors of King Canute in Church or state to keep back the incoming tides of advancing knowledge. For the scientific method is to him one in heart with the Christian method and spirit, the very method and spirit of Jesus Christ.

In the combined eagerness and humility of the true scientist, in his readiness to follow truth though it involve the surrender of all things, he sees the very spirit Christ would have in His disciples, a noble example of real trust in God and in the guidance of His Spirit. No one can read Huxley's beautiful description of the method of the scientist as sitting down in the presence of Nature in the spirit of a little child, prepared to follow wherever forthcoming facts may lead, and not feel that he is very near to the spirit the Master commended.

This does not mean, of course, that the liberal Christian accepts all that may be put forward by individuals in the name of science, or that he submits to dogmatism on the part of men of scientific eminence or pretensions —a dogmatism which is often no less offensive than the worst variety of theological absolutism. It is painfully true that good scientists may be very poor philosophers, and our glad trust in the scientific method and spirit and their well-established results, does not entail a belief in the infallibility of scientists in their theories and philosophizings and speculations about facts so obtained. A man may be unusually, or even uniquely, gifted in observing facts and deducing from them sound scientific inferences, and at the same time be dangerously untrustworthy when he attempts to account for the causes and unseen realities and ultimate explanations lying back of the facts.

The true liberal Christian subscribes to no dogma of the infallibility of science. Indeed, it is hard to conceive anything more thoroughly unscientific than a claim that science is infallible. The liberal Christian

bears clearly in mind the limitations of descriptive science, its helplessness when it attempts to deal with the world of personal values. But he believes heartily and unreservedly in the right of the scientific method to absolute control over the world of fact. Nowhere in God's world does he want "No trespass" signs or "taboo," warning science off the field. He is sure that God has given the human mind the right to range freely among all the facts of the universe, and to state frankly what it finds there; and he knows that it is not only foolish but impious to deny or restrict that right in any degree or under any plea. God meant us to know facts, all facts; and the scientific method is our one reliable means of knowing them.

The liberal Christian courageously accepts this principle, with all its implications. He believes in, and maintains, the right to use the scientific method to investigate all facts, even religious facts, and all books, even sacred books.

It follows as a matter of course, that he accepts gladly and unreservedly the historical and critical method and its results as applied to the Bible and to the Christian religion. He knows that he has no more right to refuse to consider seriously what critics say about the Bible than the papal authorities had to refuse to look through Galileo's glass, lest their world might be upset for them. Here is one vital distinction in attitude between the real liberal and the man who merely has liberal sympathies. The latter will welcome new and different facts, so far as they can be reconciled with the system he holds; the former will take the facts, and their sure implica-

tions, though they break his system to atoms. The true liberal acts unreservedly upon the dictum of a famous Scotch preacher: "A man who is afraid to face facts does not really believe in God."

The liberal Christian *trusts* the scientific method and spirit; he does not coquette with it. His relation to it is one of holy wedlock, and not a flirtation. He takes it "for better, for worse." One finds here and there a specious profession of confidence in the scientific method, which is impaired or vitiated by secret reservations as to the outcome. There are Bible Schools and theological scholars that make much of their fidelity to the scientific method, and at the same time assure their friends, their patrons and the public that nothing which science may disclose can ever make them alter their opinions. To my mind, the learned, able, and valuable writings of Bishop Gore have their value seriously lessened at certain points by obvious defects of this kind. He takes pains to assure his reader that he will pursue the scientific method; but you learn to know that from the beginning of his researches he has known pretty well just where he would come out as to certain facts and views. The true liberal is like Abraham, who "went out not knowing whither he went," knowing only that he can trust his guide, the spirit of truth.

II. As his second outstanding characteristic the liberal Christian is *supremely interested in present vital spiritual experience.*

He is supremely concerned with life as it is today. Religion to him is essentially, and beyond all else, a matter of how living men and women and children are

to live and act as God would have them do. Of course, as a sensible man, he recognizes the enormous values of our heritage from the past. He knows that there are facts in that notable past which furnish solid support for right living today. But he feels that if one could discover all the truth that the past has to tell, such historical truth could never be a working substitute for the concrete, first-hand, living Christian experience of his fellows and himself today. The carelessness of the liberal as to historical fact, his indifference as to whether this or that bit of history happened precisely in this or that way—an attitude which often troubles or alarms his conservative brother—springs largely from this absorption in first-hand living spiritual experience. The liberal countersigns with hearty satisfaction William James' assertion that only those truths are really essential that make a difference in conduct—save that he would prefer to use a larger, deeper word than conduct. He would say "spiritual experience."

When the liberal Christian discloses an attitude of disbelief or indifference toward the story of an axe head that floated, or one of the other tales of miracle from the long past, that is by no means to be construed as a mental bias against the possibility of miracle, or as evidence that the virus of anti-supernaturalism is at work in his system; or that he is at heart a skeptic or agnostic. He may heartily believe in the possibility of the miraculous. He may be, as I confess that I am, what William James calls "a piecemeal supernaturalist." His attitude toward the literal, factual truth of the particular miracle tale may be, and probably is, deter-

mined by his answer to the question, "What difference does it make, in present vital experience, whether that particular incident ever happened or not?" It is a refusal to become excited over that which does not and cannot make a real difference in the present living of human life. The liberal Christian may prefer to count the book of Jonah a parable rather than a bit of accurate history, not through a bias against the miraculous, but from an honest conviction that the book of Jonah will better accomplish what its author meant it to accomplish if it be used as one uses the story of the Good Samaritan, *i.e.*, without raising irrelevant questions as to the authentication of fact-details.

To make prime issues out of such matters seems to the liberal Christian as incredibly futile as would be a refusal to honor George Washington, or draw lessons from his character and career, until the historical accuracy of the story of the cherry tree shall have been set beyond dispute or cavil.

What do men live by? What is this life of ours? What is its chief end? What is God's part in it? What is our part in it? What is Christ? What is a Christian experience? What may I hope for? What does God want to see, in me and in the world? Those are the questions that count for the liberal Christian. Such are the only questions that count. For all questions about the past, all questions of any sort, are of value only in the degree that their answers make a difference in living. So the liberal thinks and feels; and he is very sure that he has the authority of the Master of Christians to sustain him in that position.

Many of us, as a matter of fact, believe that Jesus walked on the water, and made the dead live. I gladly confess that it is a source of some satisfaction and joy to me thus to be confident that He did what other men have not been able to do. It fits in with my sense of His uniqueness among the sons of men. But, honestly, would it be of more than trifling and secondary value if I could persuade many men to believe that Jesus walked on the water, and made the dead come to life? He does not make believers now walk on the waves. He does not now bring the dead back to life. I know devout Christians who, at funeral occasions, have requested the officiating minister not to read the account of the raising of Lazarus, lest it set going in the heart of some one the painful query, "He did that for them; why not for me?"

Other things Jesus did that he does still. Jesus saved men from sin. He set them free from their fears. He made them see God. He brought them to God and to eternal life. *These things He does now.* These facts are vital, are primary, are of absolute value, as no non-repeatable miracle-story, centuries distant, can ever be. If the liberal is indifferent or careless as to the historicity of the far away miraculous, it is only because his eyes are so focussed on *that which makes a difference in the present living of life,* that not much interest is left for what lies outside that field of vision. I hope it will not seem an invidious remark when I say that one chief reason why the liberal Christian is less concerned than his conservative brother over questions of accuracy of detail in stories from the past is that he brings not a less, but a more, direct religious interest to bear upon

them and is too deeply concerned with the lives of living folk to care very greatly for anything that affects them so slightly.

III. A third outstanding characteristic of the general attitude of the liberal Christian in his view of truth is this: *He believes in the essential unity of spiritual experience.*

He accepts the principle of continuity and refuses to believe that human life has ever been, or ever will be, essentially different from what it is now. To his view there is no "great gulf fixed" between one age and another, one set of folk and another. He builds his theology on the essential invariability of the phenomena in spiritual life as truly as the scientist builds his science on the invariability of phenomena in nature. He reads his sacred book, and says of the God found there, "This God is our God"; and he is quite sure that God was then just what He is now. All that he can find out about God from His living activities, and from life as it goes on in and around him, applies to ancient times, in his estimation, no less than to modern.

When I was a boy I accepted implicitly the dictum that the people of the Bible were very different from the rest of mankind. Their experiences were radically different from any which we may have. They actually heard God speak; they saw Him act. He dealt with them at closer range than He deals with us. That was their distinction; and proofs were offered that God was thus superlatively with them. It constitutes a wonderful advance into deeper phases of reality to move forward from that state of mind to a conviction that life for the people of the Bible was essentially like ours, their experi-

ences similar to our own; that we may know God as they did; that the differences which used to seem so marked were very largely due to different ways of regarding the same facts, the primitive Oriental mind seeing and interpreting God and life in styles of thought that our scientific age does not and cannot use. One begins to wonder if even outward events in the method of their occurrence were so very different then and now. Station a modern scientist at the Red Sea when Israel passed over, and you would probably get from him a thoroughly natural account of its passage. On the other hand set a Hebrew poet alongside Washington as he withdraws his little army from Long Island to Manhattan under cover of an opportune fog; or with Dr. Grenfell on the occasion of his rescue from the ice floe; and you would have as forthright a miracle-story as any in the Old Testament.

But whatever may be true of outward happenings—and the liberal Christian may heartily believe in the occurrence of miracles as narrated in the Bible, finding in them natural concessions to a childish age—the liberal is sure that the spiritual experience of man has been essentially the same in all the ages. He says with the apostle that "Elijah was a man of like passions with us." He is quite sure that the men of Bible days and Bible scenes had not only essentially the same life to live, the same problems to face, but also the same ways to work them out, the same spiritual resources on which to draw, that we have. Life is *one* in all vital matters. The things that matter most in the Bible are the things that are as true for us as for the men of Bible times.

Here emerges and stands clear a striking difference

between the liberal and the ultra-conservative, or fundamentalist Christian. The fundamentalist lives in a night between two days. The times of the Bible were times of daylight; God could be seen and heard plainly. The "Millennial Dawn" will usher in another day, when Christ will be visibly at hand, and men will see and hear and know God vividly and actually, as of old. But now we are between sunset and dawn, in a long and dark night, lighted only by faint glimmers from the Holy Spirit. The supernatural has withdrawn in large part from us; we grope in the natural world.

But the liberal "sees life whole." He is sure that the light of life vouchsafed to us is as bright and clear as the light in which the saints walked in Jerusalem and Galilee. He dares believe that experiences with Christ are open to us which may be one with those of Paul. The setting and description of fact and form may differ; the vital nature of the experience is the same.

From this difference in view proceeds a characteristic and marked distinction between the attitudes of the liberal and the conservative (or fundamentalist) toward the discovery of likenesses between Biblical facts and the facts of our day, or toward interpretations which tend to treat Bible life as very like our normal life. Such discoveries and interpretations delight the liberal, but distress the fundamentalist. For the one to whom religion is essentially a marvel from outside, something to be attached to, or imposed upon, our natural life, religion is weakened and lessened in the degree that the Bible is revealed as less miraculous and more normal. But the one to whom religion is essentially the living

with God of our normal life finds more of religious value in the Bible emerging with every discovery or interpretation that brings Bible characters and events more nearly into conformity with life as we know it.

In all the Bible the liberal Christian can find no text better suited to be his motto than the great word of Paul: "The life that *I now* live *in the flesh* I live by the faith of the Son of God."

These seem to be the three outstanding characteristics of the liberal Christian in his view of the truth about God and life: he accepts the scientific method; he cares supremely about present vital spiritual experience, and he is sure of the essential unity of spiritual experience, past, present and to come. We might sum it up by saying that he has a controlling passion for *reality*. I hope in the next chapter to set this forth in a way still more accurate and effective.

But, as we have said, the word "liberal" is used not only in the foregoing sense, but also to characterize a general attitude toward fellow truth-seekers. And we would not be doing full justice to the word, or to many who deserve to be included in the ranks of "liberal Christians," if we did not make the meaning clear also of "liberal" in this practical and ecclesiastical sense.

A man may be a convinced conservative in his personal theological views, and yet be, in a very real sense of the word, a truly liberal Christian. For in the ranks of that strong and growing party in the Church are many who, though conservative or even fundamentalist in their theology, are liberal in their ecclesiastical attitude and action.

At a recent ecclesiastical gathering, where lines were

sharply drawn, and party spirit ran high, a man remarked to me, "I'm a fundamentalist, and I'm a premillennarian; but I won't let anyone tell me what I have got to believe." That man was a liberal in a very real sense, and quite without knowing it.

What are the characteristic marks of liberal Christianity, in this more inclusive sense?

First of all, the liberal Christian is one who keeps an open mind toward truth. I do not mean that he keeps it open at both ends, so that it leaks. Nor need he pull down his walls. But he does not pull down the shades. He keeps his mental windows open.

That is to say, he refuses to admit to himself that *any* question is ever irrevocably settled. There are no doctrines, no experiences, no matters of any sort, in the presence of which he closes his eyes, and refuses to think, or to consider new evidence seriously offered. This does not mean that the liberal Christian has no decided opinions or convictions. He may be very sure of some truths, so very sure that in his heart he is serenely confident that never can they be disproved for him. But even these he will gladly set out in the sunlight for all men to see and examine. Even these he will hold subject to review, if what purports to be new evidence of real worth is produced. He will hold to his views, but open-mindedly, not blindly. He will fight for his convictions, but fairly, as a man of honor, not shrinking from the challenge of any honest foe or critic. He believes, with Bishop Watson, that "whoever is afraid of submitting any question, civil or religious, to the test of free discussion is more in love with his own opinion than with truth."

The second characteristic of the liberal Christian in this broader and more pragmatic definition, is his belief in the comprehensive nature and range of the true Church.

This does not mean that the liberal Christian is not in any sense a partisan. It would be quite too much to claim exemption for him from that common virtue, or vice, of humanity. He may hold his own views tenaciously, and defend them vigorously, and still be a liberal.

But emphatically he does not want the Church restricted to any one type of thought or experience, not even his own type. He feels that such restriction would be an impoverishment, not a gain. He desires to see the Church grow into a unity of faith and love, but his is a dream totally different from that of the fanatic who sees the whole world at last converted to his own particular variety of opinion, so that thought and opinion shall be uniform. The liberal would count that a curse, not a blessing. Whatever his own views may be, and however proudly or tightly he may hold them, he wants the Church, his Church, to be broad enough to include not only all who hold those views, but all who do not, and who nevertheless have undoubted Christian faith, as proved by its fruits; all who have real Christian experience of soul, and good motives and purposes for the service of God and His Kingdom.

It follows that the liberal desires to make the Church as broad and inclusive as he can, while the man at the other extreme endeavors to make the Church as narrow and exclusive as he can. The liberal would rather err

by keeping some in who should be out, than by keeping any out who should be in.

The third outstanding characteristic of the practical liberal is his trust in spirit and truth, rather than in authority and force.

This is true of the basis on which his own faith and practice is built. He rests on spiritual conviction, rather than on compulsion of logic or of ecclesiastical authority. Why does he believe on Christ? Not because the Church commands him to do so; nor because his mind is confronted with irrefutable proofs; but because his soul in experience finds Christ not only trustworthy, but irresistible. So it is that the Bible claims him, and speaks to him with divine authority. It is for the reason stated with majestic simplicity in the Westminster Confession of Faith. After pointing out that the testimony of the Church may well move us to high regard for the Scriptures, and that the many excellencies of the Bible, and its "entire perfection" may well be received as evidence of its being the Word of God, that Confession goes on to say, "Yet, notwithstanding, our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority thereof is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit, bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts."

It is equally true of the liberal Christian in his attitude to truth in general and to authority in general, that he rests fully and wholly on spirit, not on force; on truth, not on dogma. He trusts for the triumph of the truth in which he believes, or of the party to which he belongs, to free speech, clear argument, free judg-

ment; not to ecclesiastical process, or dogmatic assertion.

During the past few years some talk has been heard about "liberal propaganda." Charges have been made that liberals were trying to capture the Church, trying to advance their cause to victory through controlling or conquering the conservative forces by some ecclesiastical process. But it should always be borne in mind that one of the very conspicuous differences between liberal and fundamentalist propaganda is that the attitude of the fundamentalists toward their fellow truth-seekers permits the aggressive use of ecclesiastical weapons, and the attitude of the liberals does not. It is so evident that no one can successfully deny—probably no one would attempt to deny—that the fundamentalist groups have been using ecclesiastical processes wherever possible to make their view and their party the authoritative view and the controlling party, and to drive liberals out of the Church. So far as I am aware, no liberal anywhere, individual or group, has made the slightest effort to use ecclesiastical weapons for the disfranchisement of any conservative, or for the restriction of his liberty of thought or action. Liberals ask only freedom to say what they think, and to have a fair field and no favor, with the conscience of the Christian public as the judge. They appeal, as Paul did, to "every man's conscience in the sight of God."

An appeal to ecclesiastical authority or process in support of his beliefs would be, for any liberal, disloyalty to one of his fundamental convictions, which is that truth, not authority, spirit, not force, should be the final arbiter in whose hands the decision should rest.

This is a hasty sketch of the outward marks of liberal Christianity. Yet I trust it may not wholly fail to show something of its value and beauty. It will be obvious to any thoughtful mind that there are dangers attendant upon such a position and attitude. The liberal Christian needs to be on guard continually, watching and praying lest his very virtues run him into excesses, and lest he sin at unguarded moments—drop into looseness, indifference and indolence, or easy-going contentment with that which claims to be "normal" but may in reality be only low, cheap, and easy. We have compared the liberal Christian to Abraham who "went out not knowing whither he was going." But the liberal should beware lest he conform rather to the picture drawn by the backwoods preacher, who misquoted the text thus: "Abraham went out, not knowing whether he was goin' or not."

But the dangers attendant upon the liberal Christian position are just such as Americans and Christians are accustomed to face; such as true Americans and true Christians accept as part of the price they must pay for freedom. It is a great thing to be free. "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free." "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." It is a great thing to be liberal Christians, "not afraid to open our eyes in the presence of facts, nor ashamed to close our eyes in the presence of God"; and yet never surer of God, never nearer to Him, than when, open-eyed, we look through nature and life fearlessly and eagerly to the God Whose hands "reach through nature, moulding men."

CHAPTER II

ITS INWARD SPIRIT

In the preceding chapter we looked at liberal Christianity from the outside. We stood at a distance and took a general view of the outstanding characteristics of the liberal Christian, as a factor in the Church, and as distinguished by certain mental and practical attitudes.

Something more important remains to be done, if we would have a just and generous understanding of what liberal Christianity really is. We must ask to be taken into its heart in order to find the secret of the faith by which and in which it lives and works. What is the real basis of the religion of liberal Christians? Have they a genuine Gospel to preach, a religion which is really good news of redeeming grace? Or is liberal Christianity nothing more than modern science and philosophy with a religious flavor added?

The grave charge is made against liberal Christians that they have no real message to men and women in need; that they are essayists, whose message, reduced to its real meaning, runs something like this: "Good people, this is a beautiful world; and you ought to be very happy in it." It is commonly asserted that the sense of sin dies under liberal preaching; that the liberal pulpit sends forth a mere humanitarian Gospel, lovely and graceful, but lacking a deep sense of those stern

realities which have ever been the ground of true Christian thought and preaching—God, sin, redemption, atonement, grace. The oft-repeated charge is widely believed that the liberal preacher's use of old phrases and ideas deprives them of their ancient and virile meaning; that with dextrous skill he deliberately forces well-known and time-honored words to mean new things that take all their old vigor from them. He talks of salvation, grace, atonement, and the like, but what the fathers meant by those great words is missing. The power has gone out of the phrases.

If there be truth in this charge that liberal Christianity has no positive Gospel to present to sinful, suffering, needy men, then the matter is very serious. Has the liberal Christian nothing to offer in the name of religion except a graceful use of old words, and a set of modern ethical principles? Is he, in fact, under cover of talk about the grace of God in Christ, preaching self-righteousness and humanitarianism?

I think it must be admitted that liberal preaching is not so sharp and exact in its terminology as the older forms of preaching were and are. This is inevitable, for one of the clear distinctions between the liberal Christian and the ultra-conservative or fundamentalist Christian is this: the latter thrives amid definitions, and is never happy or at ease until he has his religious realities caught and caged in a formula, while the liberal knows that "nothing worthy proving can be proved," that no ultimate reality of the spiritual life can ever be adequately expressed in a definition or a formula. He is never so sure of truth as when he can watch it soar, free and unfettered, up into the light, and can catch

its fleeting song. The fundamentalist keeps his truths in a corral where he knows they cannot get away and he can study them at close range. The liberal steals out with his glass, to observe them where they live; they elude him, but he follows; and he is sure he knows them the better for leaving them free in order that he may watch them in action.

There must be thus an elasticity and even a vagueness about the faith of a liberal Christian which makes it hard to express it in precise terms.

It is true also that liberals have on the whole paid too little attention to the careful study and close formulation of their positive message. Liberal Christianity is still young, and is still finding and fighting its way. It has had to attempt an immense, even a gigantic task. On the one hand it has felt called to wrestle with the amazing, overwhelming body of new knowledge which the scientific discoveries of the nineteenth century have made available, the most stupendous, overpowering mass of fresh data that the human soul has ever had to meet and seek to assimilate in so short a period. Accompanying this great wealth of new knowledge has come an immense amount of crude theorizing, hasty assumption, daring and confident philosophizing, much of the old temper of materialism, and more of a temper so new that a new word, "agnosticism," had to be coined to express it. On the other hand, liberal Christianity has had to face a Church reluctant to make adjustments, obstinately standing in the old dugouts and clinging to the old weapons, and quick to condemn as a "traitor" any one who should dare suggest any thoroughgoing modifications of old creeds or customs. Subject to a

cross-fire from these two forces, liberal Christianity has had to fight desperately for its very life, defending the rights of faith against agnostic and materialistic science, and defending its right to think freely against ecclesiastical timidity, obstinacy, prejudice and inertia. Is it cause for wonder, when liberals have thus spent themselves so largely on the mere defense of their rights, that their work has been to so great an extent critical, negative, protesting, rather than constructive, positive, and appealing? It was inevitable that much should have to be done by way of awakening the Church to the inadequacy of old, accepted views and ways, before the necessity or value of the new views could be made apparent.

It may also be admitted, and with regret, that liberals have been too often and too greatly content to settle down in a negative and critical position, too little concerned with a positive Gospel. I recall with some shame a sermon I preached some years ago on the Bible. Two acute, open-minded young men told me afterwards that they went away quite awake to the inadequacy of the old, mechanical view of the Word of God, but with very little knowledge of any better view to put in its place. A few months ago a thoughtful man told me of a sermon he heard a liberal minister preach on "Repentance." He said, "When the sermon was over, everybody in the congregation knew all about repentance, the history of the doctrine, and the various meanings and theories of it; but nobody wanted to repent, or thought of doing so."

It may be that liberal Christians are open to these charges to an extent that calls for their serious consideration; that they are too academic, too cold, too apt to

look on religion as a subject for study, too critical and negative. In the degree that there is any truth in such charges, liberal preachers should repent and forsake their false ways. But I believe the fact to be that this condition has already been largely remedied. There were some years in the recent past during which it seemed as if we had but two kinds of preachers, both ineffective: the modern men, well-equipped intellectually, but cold in heart, and the narrow and reactionary men, preaching with fervor an impossible theology. One side had all the light, the other all the heat. Physicists have talked much of late about the problem of developing a "cold light." They might have found it not so long ago in some liberal pulpits.

But that situation is changing fast. More and more liberals are preaching a positive, saving Gospel. Now that they are near to winning their fight for a reasonable freedom for themselves, they can give the larger share of their minds and hearts to their positive message.

Nevertheless, as we have suggested, the liberal can never hope to state his views with the sharp definiteness that marks the theology of the older school. For he is dealing, or attempting to deal, with life, not with the forms it takes; with reality, not with theories about it. It is always easier to lead men to use formulas than to make them conscious of living processes, always easier to get them to accept a creed than to bring about a living experience in their souls. It is also harder to check up results when one is dealing with spiritual processes. Liberal Christianity must be content to carry on under these disadvantages. It must patiently seek

to exert a steady, lasting influence, rather than strive for sudden crises; and must put its stress and emphasis on the education, growth, and secret renewal of the soul's life. But it may be sustained at its long, slow task, by the realization that it is thus taking, as the best norm of spiritual experience, the Lord Jesus, rather than Paul or Augustine.

The liberal is, as we have said, profoundly interested in the *life that now is.* That fact deeply conditions his religion, his theology, his message. To him theology is primarily not an account of what once was in the past, or of what will be in some distant realm, but an attempt to explain the present living of this life of ours, in terms of spiritual reality.

What distinguishes the religion of the liberal Christian is the fact that to him religion is wholly concerned with the *personal.* To him, Christianity is distinctively and above all, the *religion of personality.*

The primary antithesis of which the liberal is vividly conscious is the antithesis confronting him at every turn between matter and spirit, or, to state it more accurately, between the personal and the impersonal. He knows two sets of facts and only two, one impersonal and the other personal. On the one hand are matter and energy, with all their range of interest and meaning and power; on the other hand is the soul of man, and all its marvelous world of spiritual realities and forces. Of the documents of a generation ago that read like prophecies of modern liberal Christianity, one of the best is Horace Bushnell's great treatise, *Nature and the Supernatural,* in which the two worlds of the impersonal and the personal confront and face each other.

To the liberal the personal is supreme, is well-nigh all. Personal, spiritual, vital, real, these are the great words which to him sum up the meaning, scope, and value of religion. They are synonymous each with the other in his thinking. Yes, and the lofty religious term "eternal" is but another expression to denote the one great thought back of all these words.

When we have said that, to the liberal Christian, the personal, the spiritual, the vital, the real, the eternal, are varying terms that all apply to the same fundamental fact or force or reality, we have furnished an explanation of certain facts about him which at times distress his brothers at the other end of the theological line. To them, there must be something tangible, physical, material, substantial, if anything is to be real. Undoubtedly that is one powerful reason why its advocates contend so inflexibly for the famous five points of fundamentalist faith, namely, the errorless original manuscripts of the Bible, the virgin birth of our Lord, the blood atonement, the resurrection of the body, and the second coming of Christ in physical presence. They are uneasy in regard to the position taken by the liberal; worried over his Bible, equally inspired whether in the form of original manuscript or copy or translation, a trustworthy and authoritative guide simply because of the Spirit which is manifest in it; troubled about his faith in the deity of Christ—a faith quite independent of how He was born, and glad of every indication that He was a man in the fullest sense; disturbed by his view of redemption, as something done not only once on Calvary, but again and again, in every human heart that will receive the grace of God, and done in the

spirit even more than with flesh and blood; concerned over his indifference to the question whether our Lord's resurrection was bodily, so long as it was truly in the living spirit; and amazed at his joyous assurance that Christ is as really with us now as He could be if He came again in bodily presence. It seems to the fundamentalist that the liberal is giving up the *reality* in these great facts when he is content with a "spiritual" interpretation of them. But to the liberal, the spiritual is the real. Matter is but the passing form which reality takes and then leaves. "The things that are seen are for the time; the things that are unseen are for the ages." To the liberal it manifests "an evil heart of unbelief" to set so much store by physical, material, formal facts.

The reality of the personal—that is the basic position of the theology of the liberal. To him religion has wholly to do with *personal* values, issues and processes of life. All else is secondary or remote in importance. The liberal Christian cares infinitely more for spirit than for the forms spirit assumes, for experience than for the creeds in which they express themselves, for life than for the instruments which it uses.

This is why the liberal Christian and his views seem so alarmingly vague and uncertain, often indeed irritating, to all externalists, all who are severely logical in matters of creed, meticulous in matters of form, or punctilious in matters of organization. Debate about errors in the Bible, or about "the historic episcopate," or about the form of baptism, or about the minute implications of a creed—all such disputing seems to him a fruitless proceeding, if not actually irreligious. In

the face of open evidence that the Spirit of God is speaking through a man, or using him, to say that he is not really a minister in the Church because some particular form has not been observed, seems like saying that a glorious singer is not a singer unless he holds a certificate from some recognized teacher. By all means let there be order and discipline. But let such questions be taken frankly as questions of order, of expediency, not as of divine right. To the liberal the spiritual is so absolutely identical with the real that he cannot whip himself into any very great concern over questions of outward form, definition, or organization.

This is what religion means to him—the supremacy, splendor, and normality of the *personal* in life. It has to do mainly or exclusively with personal life, personal relations.

To the liberal Christian, *God is personal.* And nothing else matters much to him in his thinking about God. God is the supreme Person, of whom our little personalities supply but dim reflections, yet the best we have from which to form our impressions of Him. Forced to choose, the liberal would take all the definitions of God to be found in the theologies, and gladly surrender them all in exchange for the one simple, profound statement of Christ, "God is spirit; and they that worship Him must worship in spirit and in reality."

He is very sure that God is more like what we call "human nature" than He is like what we call "nature." He is very sure that the men who "go to nature" to find God, who think they honor God by using "It" as their pronoun of reference rather than "He," who talk of "Infinite Energy" rather than of "Infinite Spirit,"

are on the wrong track. He feels that no other sincere men have ever lost God so completely and painfully as have those who, to use Henry Adams' startling phrase, have exchanged the Virgin for the dynamo, and worship blind force instead of pitying love.

> "We know not whether you are kind
> Or cruel, in your fiercer mood;
> But, be you matter, be you mind,
> We think we know that you are blind,
> And we alone are good."

Is there anything in the world more tragic than such a picture of the human soul standing alone in the universe, *alone* good, alone personal? Life is a hideous farce unless the heart of things is like the heart of a man instead of the coils of a dynamo.

The liberal Christian knows this of God—and in comparison cares for little else—that God is more like man than like anything else that He has made or is making; that the surest facts about Him are that He knows, loves, wills as we do, and is free, as we are, only gloriously, infinitely more so. God is personal. With all his heart the liberal Christian confesses his faith in "God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth."

When he says "maker," his thoughts rove not back, however, to a distant point when God made all things at once. His thoughts fly to the Father, who "worketh even until now," making, creating, "center and soul of every sphere." He makes this day, this life I live, this world I live in. The liberal Christian sees God about him, in the act, now, of *making* the heaven and the earth. He is, to use Paul's poetic phrase, "alive unto

God." The world he lives in is a home, touched with the personality of the divine homemaker.

The faith of the liberal fits in readily with any and every theory or view of how the world has come to be what it is, which is not mechanical or materialistic, every explanation which leaves room for the Living God. The liberal is not at all disturbed by the theory of evolution; rather he welcomes it, as vastly more worthy than is any fiat theory of a God who thinks, works, and wills, a "poetic" God, in the original sense of the Greek word, in which the poet is the *creator*, the *maker*. The world revealed to the evolutionist seems to the liberal to call for vast patience, ingenuity, resourcefulness, and vital energy on the part of its Maker—qualities all personal and spiritual. How that great Personality we call God makes His connections with the world of matter and force the liberal does not know. But neither does he know how human personality makes its will effective in the control of its body and its world. He is keenly interested in developments of modern physical theory, wherein all matter seems to be resolved into whirls of energy, and energy seems to draw very near in its nature to what we call will-power. On the other hand, the liberal Christian also has Bergsonian moments, when his impression is very clear of a God struggling with His world, fighting His way, hard-pressed. Yet of this the liberal Christian is sure—that spirit will win: that the chief glory of that "far-off, divine event to which the whole creation moves," is its coming "not by might, nor by power, but by spirit."

Because he cares so supremely about the personality of God, other ideas of God fade for him in comparison

into a place of secondary importance or meaning. Speculations about the "divine substance" lie outside the range of his interests. Declarations about God's sovereignty, or His transcendence, or, for that matter, His immanence, may be interesting as speculation; they cannot be primary for faith and practice. "God is Spirit"; there is the one great truth. God is personal, God is "Our Father"; that is the one sure, fixed doctrine about God. That means that He is holy and loving and wise. It means that we can depend on His providence. It saves the soul from the terror of being caged in a mechanical universe, and encourages to prayer, and to seeking after God.

> "Speak to Him, thou, for He hears,
> And Spirit with Spirit can meet."

The liberal Christian is very sure also that the personal God is best revealed in and through the personal; indeed that there alone, in personality, do we adequately find a God adequate for the full needs and uses of our souls.

The liberal enters gladly into Paul's thought, that "the invisible things of God are understood by the things which are made"; but he is very sure that God is best seen in the persons He makes; indeed that there alone is He seen without distortion. "The heavens declare the glory of God": yes—but the glory of God is seen in higher manifestation in the face of a pure, loving little child than it can ever be seen by the aid of the mightiest telescope in all the marvel of the Galaxy. We see *what God is* far better in the Book of Psalms than through the use of the spectroscope. Human per-

sonality is the one satisfying place to look for knowledge of God as He really is.

For this reason the Bible is deeply satisfying to the liberal Christian; it means more to him than it could possibly mean were not God and life to him wholly defined in terms of personality. He values the Bible not primarily as a flawless law book, an unimpeachable code of ethics, or an authoritative system of doctrine. It is not to him, first of all or most of all, a statement of facts or principles. It is the revelation of Personality, God made clear in the lives and spirits of men and women. He values the Bible for what it is, a rich, glorious, tangled, wildflower garden of human personalities, alight and alive with the life of the Divine Person, walking in the garden and loving it. What a strange sort of book to be the revelation of God, if God were first of all and most of all the Absolute, the Great First Cause, a theological Being, the Sustainer of the moral order, primarily something to be understood, correctly defined, and apprehended by the intellect. Never so foolish a book if that were its end and object! But what a perfect book to reveal Him, if He is utterly and wholly Person, so that spirit only can reveal what He is, so that He can best be made known in the flash and play of human personality, of love and goodness and sacrifice and courage, and joy and the beauty of holiness. We know God through the Bible as we never can through the creeds, because there is logic in the creeds but life in the Bible, thoughts in the creeds but men in the Bible. We know God supremely through the Bible, not by reason of its intellectual content, its majestic thoughts, calm meditations, and inspired bits of

theological speculation; but because we find Him in Abraham and Moses, in David, Elijah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Peter, Paul, John, and over all, in all and above all, in Christ Jesus. Was not Jesus the greatest of teachers about God? And did He not deliberately use parables, stories with human interest and color in them? He did not define God: He showed us God in the life of man and of the world.

To use the words of Professor Deissmann:

> "Jesus did not lecture *de deo*. He bore witness of God. His teaching of God is a prophetic testimony born out of His inner experience. Jesus preaches about what has been experienced, what has been given, what has been striven for, not what has been brooded over and studied. It is not His system, which one finds in His words, it is His soul. His words and works are self-revealing; when we hear Him speak, we listen to the heart-throb of His faith and hope."

It is because the liberal Christian thus cares only for God as personal, and for the revelation of Him in terms of personality, that he is so cheerfully careless—so dangerously careless, his over-orthodox brother thinks—as to some of the questions men raise about the Bible. Is it wholly without error? Are its lists of kings and its statements of historical fact accurate? Are its science and philosophy unimpeachable? Is its account of creation to be defended at all hazards and in every detail, no matter what modern science and philosophy may discover or declare? The liberal Christian cannot be worked up to any high pitch of excitement over such questions. All around him he sees personality at work

revealing and expressing itself in an amazing variety of manifestations. You never can tell what human personality will do. How then can one lay down in advance the way Divine Personality must take or be discredited? He is quite content to have God reveal Himself in any way He will.

To him it is incredibly, pathetically childish for any one to wish to keep the Bible away from the critics, crying out, "If errors and human weaknesses are found in it, the Bible cannot make good its claim to reveal God." He knows well that the Personal God can reveal Himself only through Personality; and none of the persons he knows are free from human weaknesses. What if the Book which acquaints us with the varied persons used of God to reveal His true nature as nowhere else, exhibits the defects of those persons in its very fiber? Does it not become thereby the more faithful record of those personal experiences in which alone the personality of God can be made clear? It seems to the liberal Christian arrogant presumption to say, "The Bible cannot be from God, the true revelation of Him, unless it conform to what I and others agree in advance that a revelation of God should be." He takes the book as it is, freely investigated and judged in the light of the best and sanest critical common sense of which scholars are capable, and finds God in it, the Personal Spirit, speaking to his own soul. If the message authenticates itself by its spiritual character and appeal as from his Father, what should he care about the sort of envelope in which it is enclosed, or the postmark it bears, or whether here or there the one who pens it has missed a letter or misspelled a word? The Bible is important

and valuable to the extent that it is a revelation of the Infinite Person through varied human personalities. It is authoritative, not because it can be shown to have no flaw in it, but because so evidently God is in it. To the ultra-conservative such an ordered creed as the Westminster Confession of Faith must seem much more adequate and satisfactory as a revelation of the truth of God than the loosely ordered material in the Bible. But, here as everywhere, "the foolishness of God is wiser than men"; the power of the great Confession is waning, while the Bible continues to meet and serve every new age with renewed and youthful vigor.

The more the liberal studies his Bible, the more clear and wonderful appears the plain evidence of its timelessness, its fresh, vital meaning for every new age. Truly the Book is eternal, and that because it is the revelation of personality, the only eternal reality we know. The wonder of the Scriptures to the liberal Christian, the plainest proof of their inspiration, is not that they record facts of long ago with meticulous and unerring accuracy, but that they hold the mirror up to contemporary life with a startling freshness seldom found even in the daily newspaper. The teachings of the Bible are always coming out in new patterns. There is a kaleidoscopic quality about them. At every turn of the wheel of time the old bits of color and form fall into new beauties of alignment. Take a man who can see straight, one who is no longer the slave of the conventional, and really knows his Bible, and let such an one gain a new idea as to the conduct of life, find a fresh way of looking at it, and then take up his Bible. Out from it will flash lights on that new idea, that will startle and amaze

him, and establish him in a new reverence and confidence toward this "Word of God that *liveth* and abideth forever."

The liberal arises from his study of the Bible, under the full and free light of all that the critics and scholars say about it, joyously repeating what one of the New Testament writers said of the Word of God, "We have also the Word of prophecy made more sure, whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a lamp that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn and the day star arise in your hearts"—a wonderful example of inspired insight, clearly pointing out the principle that the value of the Bible is in its ministry in promoting spiritual experience, in guiding us until in our own hearts arises the light of God's presence, and the saving personal knowledge of His will.

To the liberal, Christianity, the religion of personality, finds its climax in Jesus Christ, the supreme personality of history, the pre-eminent abiding and growing personal force in the world's long life.

Whatever else may be doubtful about the religion and theology of the liberal Christian, this is sure, that it loses itself and finds itself wholly in Christ. If there is in the whole Bible one little phrase which, more than any other, sums up his faith and spiritual experience, that phrase is Paul's—"in Christ." The liberal would move, live and have his whole being in Christ.

Christ is to him the perfect and complete revelation of God to men. Just because God is to him wholly personal, and can be adequately revealed only in personality, it follows that God is supremely and finally revealed in the supreme and ideal man. All of God that

man can know in personal experience is in Jesus. And the liberal Christian is sure of this, as of nothing else, that, rove as far as the mind of man can through the vast ranges of the universe of facts and forces, wherever God is found we find One who is essentially Christlike. "God is always and everywhere like Jesus." That is the surest element in the faith of the liberal Christian.

What impresses him in Jesus is simply and well-nigh wholly His *personality.* The stories told of Him are of importance only as faithfully revealing what He really was, and how He impressed the men who walked and talked with Him. Did He work miracles? I speak for many liberals when I say that I am sure He did; that the power to work miracles fits in with what I feel and know to have been in Him. Who shall set bounds to what a personality infinitely perfect can do? But I am sure I speak for all true liberals when I say that the question as to whether He worked miracles is a question of secondary importance. If we believe He worked miracles, we believe it because we have first seen in Him one who cannot have bounds set to His possibilities, one who could work a miracle without having it turn into a bit of cheap magic, a trick to catch the crowd. As one of the greatest preachers of our day has said, "How small other miracles look alongside the fact that this man, in three short years, so lived, taught and died as to change the whole current of human history." What He *was* is what counts; yes, and what He *is,* even more.

Here also the liberal lays himself open to misunderstanding and suspicion of looseness in belief, through the fact that his utter absorption in the height and depth

and breadth of meaning in the personality of Jesus makes him indifferent to problems that to the older theology and its adherents seem of prime importance. All the metaphysical questions tangled with the idea of substance, of two natures and one person; all the minutiæ of the process whereby God could effect an entrance into human life, speculations about the pre-existence of Christ, and about the limits and bounds of the divine and human in Him—judgment on all these, interesting as they may be, important as some of them are, may be suspended and not seriously affect the faith of the liberal that in Jesus we have the supreme, final, satisfying revelation of the Living and Loving God, our Father. On the indisputably essential points he is orthodox as few have been. To him Jesus Christ is wholly and absolutely man, as the creeds have declared Him to be; wholly and absolutely God, as the creeds have declared Him to be. For God is personal, and man is personal. God is love; and love cannot be one thing in God, and another in us. Christ is perfect love, personality at its highest. So the man, Christ Jesus, is God in human experience, God in man.

> "Thou seemest human and divine,
> The highest, holiest manhood, Thou."

One mistake the liberal Christian avoids, a mistake prolific of trouble through all the Christian centuries. To him the truth of the divinity, or deity, of Jesus means that God is to be construed in the terms of Jesus, even more than that Jesus is to be construed in the terms of God. Christ comes to men as Paul did to the Athenians, to point to their altars and theologies, built "to an unknown God," and cry, "Whom therefore

ye ignorantly worship, Him declare I unto you." Jesus makes the unknown God known in terms of human personality. And at once they begin to say "Jesus is God," and to entangle that clear, definite, human figure of Jesus in all their older thoughts and speculations about the unknown God, so that in the end He becomes a misty, remote figure in the heavens. It is as if, in algebra, having an equation, x equals a plus b, in which x, the unknown, is expressed in terms of a and b, the known, we should proceed to try to find the value of a and b in terms of x. Why, the only intelligible meaning of the equation, the only possibility of its practical and satisfying solution, consists in seeking the value of the unknown in terms of the known. And the whole practical value of the equation, "Jesus is God," is the knowledge of God to which it leads in terms of the "warm, sweet, tender," human personality of Jesus, to know Him through the one whom He has sent.

In this way, the liberal Christian is completely protected from the ever-present doctrinal danger of taking Christ as a sort of second God, coming to earth to do a particular act in the interests of God the Father. To the liberal, what Christ was, God is; what Christ did, God does. The life and death of Jesus, unique story of a unique life and death, are to him like a crucial chapter in the biography of a friend, giving an account of how He did something once that makes us all forever sure of Him and of how He will always act everywhere.

To the liberal Christian, the very heart of the Christian religion is this finding in Christ of the eternal God. God is what Jesus was: God does what Jesus did. We

find God in Him. We come to God through Him. We know God and love God in Him.

It is here that the liberal Christian finds the true meaning and efficacy of the sacrifice of Christ. To his mind that atoning sacrifice loses in part its value and power when treated as an isolated event, a "thing in itself." It was indeed "once for all," a sacrifice never to be repeated, a definite act at a definite time, wherein the justice and love of God meet. It is simple history, a fact nevertheless of immense significance, as Harnack points out, that men always had altars of sacrifice until Christ came, and ever since have ceased to sacrifice wherever Christ comes. But to the liberal Christian that death on the cross is powerful and divinely significant in a way it could not have been had it been a single event only—something that might have been done as well on Mars or in heaven as here on earth, a transaction to placate God. To the liberal Christian, that death gathers its most powerful significance from the fact that it is one with the life of Jesus and one with the life of all humanity and with all the life of God in His world, tied in with all history before itself, and with all that comes after, intimately associated with all that is meant everywhere else by death, suffering, sacrifice, martyrdom; above all a deep sounding in the revelation of God as the Father, showing how far He will go to deal with sin and suffering, and how absolutely He relies on spiritual power to save; it is powerful as a revelation, because it gives in one supreme object lesson the key to the understanding of what God is doing all the time, saving our souls by living, suffering, dying with us—by full identification of His personal life with ours. "In

all their affliction He was afflicted, and the angel of His presence saved them." That is the eternal truth of atonement. The Son of God is the "lamb slain from the foundation of the world," and the one perfect forth-setting down to the end of time, of the "love that will not let us go," but stands ever ready to redeem, at any cost.

I know some will say that this reduces the theology of the cross to a "moral influence theory." But that is not true. It is not the moral influence that counts and that saves. It is an overwhelming recognition of God in Christ, now saving us by His present living grace, of which Calvary is the perfect symbol and expression.

Here again the liberal Christian is not primarily concerned with matters that lie far back. He is very little interested in Adam and his first sin—as little as the Master was. He recalls how once the disciples raised the question of transmitted guilt, "Master, who did sin, this man or his parents?" and Jesus let that question slip by, caring only that "the works of God might be manifested," supremely interested in *present salvation.* The liberal believes that that disposition represents the eternal attitude of God as well as of Christ, and that it should be his own attitude. Here is sin, and here is the present grace of God; let them come together. That is all.

The charge is often made that the liberal takes a light view of sin. So far as it is true, it is a serious charge. For certainly the Master took no light view of sin. No one can quite deserve the name of Christian, in his theology, who does not see sin as the great force to grapple with, the taproot of all misery.

But, often, all there is to this charge that the liberal deals lightly with sin, is the fact that his vision of sin is different from that of the older theology. The true liberal has a tremendous sense of the reality and curse of social sins, and of our personal responsibility for them. I dare to say that liberal preachers, as a whole, are more sensitive to the real sins of our day, and more severe and outspoken in dealing with them, than are any other class of preachers. Certain popular evangelists, for example, have poured out the whole wealth of their powers of invective against small peccadillos or doubtful practices, but have remained silent in regard to the really terrible evils of our time—war, wage slavery, mammon-worship, commercialized amusement, exploitation of persons for gain, materialistic thinking and living and the like—though earnestly urged to bring their power over the people to bear upon these outstanding sins. Liberal Christians are alive to these sins, and believe that the grace of God in Christ alone can deliver us from them.

In line with the faith of the liberal Christian that religion is fundamentally personal, his view of sin is mainly of a wrong personal relationship between the sinner and God. That is, his chief concern over sin is not over a violation of legal requirements, a breach of law and order, over something forensic or governmental in its bearing. Sin presents itself to him chiefly as a personal breach with, an offense against, the love and goodness of the Father. The break in these personal relations is the feature that most weighs on him. And nothing can set that right but the restoration of right personal relations, the personal return to God. It

is safe to say that the parable of the Prodigal Son means more to the liberal, is more satisfying to him just as it stands, than to any other variety of Christian. In that parable the son stands in need of no one to come between himself and his Father. He "comes to himself," and then comes home. That is all. And the death of Christ is to the liberal Christian the eternal proof that God will always welcome the returning sinner. More—that He will go to any lengths to save him from his sin. It is clear to him that the acceptance of no formula, no ritual acts, can make one right with God; nothing, indeed, but personal penitence, change of heart, and trust. What can any one offer that is acceptable to his Father except honest love and trust?

Saving Faith, to the liberal Christian, is entirely personal. It is trust in Some One, not belief in some thing. Of the two definitions of faith found in the Westminster theology, the liberal Christian accepts more readily the noble statement, "Faith in Jesus Christ is a saving grace, whereby we receive and rest upon Him alone for salvation, as He is offered to us in the Gospel." He prefers it to the statement that faith means taking as true whatever God tells us in His Word. For he knows that one might take as fact every word in the Bible, and yet not be saved in the least by that mental exercise; whereas one cannot "receive and rest upon" the grace of God in Christ, and not find the truth and beauty of salvation coming to him.

To the liberal Christian salvation is a very real, living experience, though complex as life itself and as hard to define accurately. For salvation *is* life. It is a personal experience enriched by an enormous fund of

fresh meaning. It is in growing fullness the life God meant us to live, the "life that is life indeed." To the liveral salvation is not only *related* to goodness: the goodness *is* the salvation. And it is a goodness full of joy. Were the liberal Christian asked to attempt a definition of what he means by being "saved," his answer might be that to be saved is to enjoy being holy and loving.

The blessedness hoped for in the future may enter largely into the conception of salvation. But, even so, the liberal knows, as Stopford Brooke states in one of his hymns, that "goodness is my only heaven." One should desire to be pure and right and loving not because heaven is the reward of such character, but because such character *is* heaven. Heaven is the eternal enjoyment of Christliness.

The liberal Christian is very clear also as to the means and the way by which salvation comes to one. The grace of God, clearly seen in Christ, coming through the Spirit of God to everyone who truly hungers and thirsts after salvation, that "bread of God, which comes down from heaven and gives life unto the world," is the secret of true life. It comes to humble souls, "poor in spirit," willing and glad to come to God as little children, asking questions of Him as children do, but making no attempt at bargains as grown men are too apt to do. It may use, but is not inseparably tied to nor solely dependent on any formula, any creed, any sacrament, any ritual. This grace of God comes, bringing salvation into one's life, or wells up within one's being, in response to a real, living hunger and thirst for the

Living God, revealed in Jesus, who draws near to us in the Holy Spirit.

The liberal Christian's faith in the life eternal is strong. Like all his faiths, it proceeds from and centers around the great fact of personality. By so much as personality is the best thing in God's world, are we sure that it will not terminate with the breath, but will last and live on in the unseen world. This world would lack meaning and dignity, become a "blot or a blank," if death could make an end of the spirit of man.

It is in the glory of Christ's personality that the liberal finds the surest proof of His resurrection from the dead. He is well aware that the external and contemporary testimony to that event is such as would not hold in any court. His joyous assurance, nevertheless, matches that which Peter stated so forcibly and simply when, speaking of Jesus and death, he said, "It was not possible that *He* should be holden of *it*." For the spirit of Jesus, the personality of Jesus, to have been overcome of death, for that Holy One to have seen corruption, would turn life into a hideous jest.

But the liberal Christian is more or less indifferent to the question whether it was in the body or in the spirit that Jesus rose; whether it was in the "same body in which He suffered," or in the new "spiritual body," of which Paul speaks with such confidence. This he knows, that the Lord really lived after His death on the cross, and that the belief of His disciples that He was living and had triumphed over death, was due not to excited imaginations which misled them into taking fancies for facts, but to Jesus Himself, their

Lord and ours, who made them conscious of His living presence. How He did this, the liberal can content himself to let remain an unsettled question, whether through spiritual visions, or through the assumption of a physical form.

The crucial fact, that which counts, is the indestructible persuasion that He lives, and is with us now, our Lord, our Master, through whom God draws near to us and we to Him.

There is left for mention one more strong, outstanding element in the faith of the liberal Christian, as definitely distinctive as any of the others. It is a profound conviction from which there is no escape for him that the way of Jesus is meant to be, and can be, trodden by men led by the grace of God; the faith that *Jesus' way of life is practicable.*

It is astonishing how often, in the history of the Christian religion, orthodox belief in creeds and doctrines, even extreme and fanatical orthodoxy, has gone hand in hand with practical disbelief in the workability of the teachings and ideals of Jesus: how ready men have been to persuade themselves and others that the teachings of Jesus have no vital connection with salvation, save as beautiful statements of the sort of life we may expect to issue from the right sort of belief. This at least the liberal Christian has in his religion, a downright, thoroughgoing conviction that Jesus meant us to live, here and now, in the way of His teachings and example.

Many of the ultra-orthodox seem to have forgotten that severe question of the Master, "Why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things that I say?" They

seem never to have discerned what Roswell D. Hitchcock so clearly states in his comment on that verse: "The man who calls Jesus 'Lord' is orthodox; for he acknowledges His divinity: the man who says, 'Lord, Lord,' is pious as well as orthodox, for he repeats the word with unction. And our Lord tells us here that neither orthodoxy, nor piety, nor both together, count for so much as does the simple doing of what He tells us to do." No one can get away from that clear truth without lapsing into spiritual disingenuousness.

Perhaps the worst heresy of our day is the position taken by certain extreme dogmatists, who blandly tell us that the Sermon on the Mount and the other teachings of Jesus are "not for this dispensation," or obscure the plain teachings of the Master by turning them into theological allegories. A precious bit of such exegesis came to me recently from such a twisted soul, which declared that the parable of the Good Samaritan was not given to inspire us to kindness, still less to put the seal of approval on a kindly and loving heretic: that we rightly understand that story only when we see in the wounded traveler a type of sinful humanity, in the Good Samaritan the Savior, in the oil and wine the blood of the atonement and the grace of the Spirit, and so the whole parable turns out to be an allegory of the working of the dogmatist's own scheme of salvation. Of course he conveniently omitted the direction, "Go and do thou likewise!" Such exegesis is evangelicalism gone crazy.

All such theological fooling with the plain teachings of our Lord's words and life the liberal throws aside for the rubbish that it is. And he is sure of this as of

little else, that the Son of God came and lived and taught, that men might find in His words and example the way to live, and in His dying grace and living fellowship the power to live in that way.

One sometimes falls to wondering whether the violent opposition offered to the liberal Gospel may not spring in large part from the fact that that Gospel is so high and so hard. It is so much easier to "believe in Christ" as the traditional evangelist presents that opportunity, and then go away, singing, "Nothing either great or small remains for me to do," than it is to *believe on Christ* as the liberal Christian defines that act, devoting one's life from end to end, all through, to walking in the way of Jesus, keeping the commands of Jesus, living in the spirit of Jesus, defending and pushing forward the ideals of Jesus, standing with Jesus and following Him, come life, come death, with nothing to help but the silent grace of God in the heart. But, hard to seeming impossibility though it be, *that* is the real Gospel, in which alone the world can find its real and full salvation.

Was Jesus a Christian? On that question liberals and fundamentalists divide. The fundamentalist says that Christ could not have been a Christian in any true sense, for Christianity did not begin until the day of the cross, and the Christian is essentially one who believes in what Christ *did* on that day.

But Phillips Brooks clearly asserts his faith that "Christ was Himself the first Christian, that in Him was first displayed the power of that grace by which all who believed in Him were afterwards to be helped

and saved." The liberal stands with Phillips Brooks. To him Christianity is the living of that high, holy, loving, self-sacrificing, personal, eternal life, which God set before us in Jesus, and Christ saves us in that He first lived that life perfectly himself, and by His life, death and present grace enables us, too, to cross its threshold and begin to live it.

So the religion of the liberal Christian expresses itself wholly in terms of the personal. Religion is a personal experience of fellowship with God. Christianity is a personal experience of God as revealed in Christ. The facts of the life of Jesus form its indispensable background. Without those facts it would be blind and halt and poor, or would cease to exist. But the essence of being a Christian lies not in the historical facts, nor in the acceptance of the facts as facts, but in proving in one's own present experience that God is now what He was then in Jesus, and does now what He did then in Jesus: that God in Christ is here to save you and me and to save the world through His present, living grace.

Christianity, to the liberal Christian, is the religion of personality, personal friendship with the Father through Christ, issuing in pure, loving personal relationships that broaden to take into their embrace the whole world of mankind. It is "eternal life, in the midst of time, by the strength and under the eyes of God," as a great Christian thinker has phrased it. It is a holy, loving, trustful, daring, joyous life, made possible and actual through following the teachings and example of the Lord Jesus, under the inspiration of His personal

friendship, and through the ever-dying, ever-living grace of God which is in Him, and may be in us. Surely that is a Gospel. I dare assert that that is the everlasting Gospel.

CHAPTER III

CONTRAST WITH OTHER TYPES

An attempt has now been made to show what liberal Christianity is. In so rich and varied a movement it has been, of course, impossible to do this justly and completely in so small a compass. Such a movement, spiritual, elastic, growing, cannot be shut in a definition or set in a formula. But its main outlines have been sketched. In the practical workings of his religious experience the liberal Christian puts his trust in the free human intellect; welcomes truth from whatever source; rejoices in the scientific method; adopts its clear results; and is ever ready to re-open questions and to re-examine evidence. He wants the Church kept a large, inclusive, comprehensive body. Internally he finds all his faith and hope realized in personality, pre-eminently in the supreme personality, Jesus Christ. And he cares supremely for present, vital spiritual experience.

There is another way still of estimating liberal Christianity, which will sharpen its outlines and make its meaning still more sure. That is, to compare it with other forms or phases of Christianity. There are many of these varieties extant, each quite certain of itself and of its own importance and authority, ranging from ancient Oriental sects, Nestorian, Coptic, and others, to the most recent cults, Theosophy, Christian Science, and the like. Obviously we cannot here set liberal

Christianity over against each one of all these. Nor is there need that we should. Practically it comes into comparison especially with two, at the extremes from each other, the authoritarian and the humanitarian.

These two types exist in sharpest contrast with each other. Liberal Christianity stands between them. It shares positions and possessions with both, but in spirit and truth it is one with neither of them. We shall know it better for seeing clearly how to differentiate between it and these two types of Christian faith and life which are so strong in our day. There are many grades or varieties of both, but I shall deal with each of them in its extreme form.

First in point of dignity, in numbers, in age and power, stands the authoritarian type. Its adherents make up the overwhelming mass of the Church membership. That is something sobering, if not staggering, to realize. Even in this enlightened age, the vast multitude of those called by the name of "Christian" are still in the grip of "the religion of authority."

By "authoritarian" Christianity I mean that form, or rather those forms, of Christianity which hold that the essentials of the Christian religion are divinely fixed and constitute an unalterable system which is not subject to the criticism of human reason, nor dependent for its power and authority on spiritual experience. Superior to all that the mind and soul of man can perceive or discover, they are arbitrarily and directly imposed by the will of God, and are to be disregarded, therefore, or set aside only on peril of eternal loss to the soul or the society that dares so deal with them.

Authoritarian Christianity takes two main forms. We

may call them the institutional, and the dogmatic. They are alike in setting up a claim to possess absolute authority, to which implicit obedience must be given. They differ in their views as to the seat of authority, or the way by which its domination is to be exerted over men's souls.

We take first the institutional type. Fundamental here is the postulate that God has established in the Church an authoritative institution, which, through the sacraments, nourishes the spiritual life of man; and that out of this institutional and sacramental system there is no ordinary possibility of salvation. At any rate there is no assurance of the possession of a true and valid religion or of the impartation of divine grace outside the operation of this organized system.

Two conceptions are combined here. One of them, the sacramental, is very ancient in origin indeed. Underlying it is the notion of spiritual substance, the view that makes spiritual life to be something that can be imparted or transferred in a quasi-material form. This conception goes back for its roots to the eating of offerings and the communion meal. There may be even dim and shadowy associations in it with the conviction, strong in primitive times, that by eating the heart of a brave foe his strength and courage would take up their abode in the eater. Strange is the way in which crude and brutal superstitions mingle with the highest and most mystical practices and faiths; and nowhere else is this more apparent than here in sacramentarianism.

Closely woven with the sacramental is the organizational element in authoritarianism. If the sacraments

are really a means of imparting divine grace, their administration must be certified, assured, and safeguarded from falling into the hands of the unworthy. How can they be thus protected from abuse, save through an accredited priesthood? So arose and persists the elaborate organization of the Catholic Church, and the same insistence is found, in modified form, through all the sacramentarian branches of the Church—Roman, Greek, Anglican—on an ordered ministry, in unbroken line of succession from the apostles, either through a historic episcopate, or some other divinely ordered means.

A Young Men's Christian Association Secretary has told of the lengths to which he had to go in order to secure an administration of the sacrament which they would consider valid to some 10,000 Russians in an Austrian prison camp. He discovered that nothing would so comfort and satisfy their souls as to partake in a true administration of the sacrament. But in order to be validly administered according to their fixed ideas, the bread and wine must be consecrated by a regular priest of the Greek Church, and then must be brought to them by regularly ordained priests of that communion. No other hands must touch it. With great difficulty he arranged to have the sacramental elements consecrated duly by a priest in Russia, and brought by that priest to the border; there they were received by a priest of the Greek order living among the prisoners, and brought to the camp. When the sacrament was administered, the whole body of 10,000 men broke down and sobbed, so overcome were they with joy and mystical emotion. But had that chain been broken anywhere,

had any hand touched the sacred vessel save the hand of one of their own ordained priests, the efficacy of the rite would have been destroyed. Characteristic of this type of Christianity, indeed essential to it, is such emphasis on the outward, the organizational and the institutional. Such words as, "This is my body," and "Thou art Peter, and on this rock I will build my Church," are taken by it in an absolutely literal sense. Authoritarian Christianity has built immense, lasting, powerful institutions on its assumption that God, in Christ, established a Church, with an unalterable line of priests and order of sacraments, whereby alone the grace of God can properly and surely come to the aid and comfort of the souls of men.

This system has long held the field. Within two hundred years after Jesus lived and died and rose, we find this sacramentarian type of religion in full sway; this system testifying of grace coming from God to man through the right administration of the bread and wine of the Eucharist, and the water of baptism. Down through the ages it has come, exercising mighty power over the souls of men. Even Luther could not wholly break away from its seductive influence. "Hoc est corpus meum"; he hurled those words at Zwingli as vigorously as any Roman cardinal could have proclaimed them. We note the growing spread of "Catholic" doctrine and practice in the Anglican and American Episcopal churches. That the channels of the grace of God are the sacraments, and that a ministry deriving from the apostles is essential to their valid administration—such is the view held by vast multitudes, a view entitled to respect.

Grant the premises, the conclusions follow readily enough. One rises from the reading of Cardinal Gibbons' *Faith of Our Fathers,* not knowing at which to marvel more, the insecurity of the sandy foundation, or the marvelous size and lasting splendor of the structure built upon it. The strength of the book is simply in its appeal to the human desire for assurance, for authority. It is based altogether on *a priori* reasoning. "Would God have left the soul of man to chance? Must He not have provided absolute assurance on so grave a matter as the salvation of the soul? Where can one hope to find such assurance save in the Church He Himself established through Christ?" All the stumbling-blocks are lightly dismissed, or left unmentioned—the transmission of Peter's primacy, the establishment of Rome as center and seat of authority, the power and right of the pope—all these are ignored and attention concentrated on the question, "Would God have left such weighty matters undecided?" Reading that apologetic for the Roman religion, and realizing that it has had a sale of nearly 2,000,000 copies, and that it expresses the heart-conviction of a vast mass of loyal, devoted Christians, one wonders when, if ever, the soul of man will be free. He dramatizes this great throng hurrying along, blindly leaping obstacles, shutting their eyes, stifling their doubts, under the press of the fear: "You are lost without authority," and the plea, "If authority, why not the best, oldest, and most thoroughgoing?" There was no more open-minded, intelligent Catholic in America than Cardinal Gibbons. But his whole argument for authority as exemplified in the Catholic Church is puerile. It amounts to this:—

Christ speaks of the Church, not of Churches; therefore there must be but one Church, one institution, with one supreme pontiff. Christ speaks of a kingdom; but always a kingdom has one King. He speaks of a body; but a body has one head. He speaks of His religion under the analogy of a marriage; but a true marriage gives a man but one wife. The perfect harmony evident in the visible universe must have a similar harmony as its counterpart in the spiritual world. On the basis of these analogies, and of these only, he proceeds to his conclusion, "Hence it is clear that Jesus Christ intended that His Church should have one common doctrine which all Christians are bound to believe, and one uniform government to which all should be loyally attached." "No church can claim to be the true one, whose doctrines differ from those of the Apostles, or whose ministers are unable to trace, by an unbroken chain, their authority to an apostolic source."

Here, then, is one clearly recognized, well-defined form of Christianity that has persisted through long centuries, exercising tremendous power over masses of men, appealing successfully not only to the ignorant, but to many mystical, devout, highminded, noble men and women.

Liberal Christianity offers the sharpest contrast to this form of authoritarian religion. It says, "First prove that these stupendous claims of yours are well-based. We will not take the word of interested parties, of those committed to the system, but must have the word of unprejudiced scholars." From them it learns how slender, how mythical, are the grounds for apostolic precedent and sanction. Read in the best light obtain-

able, the New Testament clearly disavows the whole complicated scheme of sacramentarianism and institutionalism. From his study of the Græco-Roman world of the first century, the liberal is persuaded that Catholic Christianity has far more vital connection on the one hand with Judaism and its system of priesthood and sacrifice, and on the other hand with Hellenic and Oriental mystery-cults, than it has with the Christianity of the New Testament. He finds little foundation for such sacramentarian religion in Paul, and none at all in the Gospels. He sees in Jesus and His religion the culmination of the prophetic movement, which always strove to set the religion of the spirit above the religion of outward rites and institutions. He is very sure that Harnack is right in his estimate and judgment of Catholic Christianity:

"What modification has the gospel undergone, and how much of it is left? Well—this is not a matter that needs many words—the whole outward and visible institution of a church claiming divine dignity has no foundation whatever in the gospel. It is a case not of distortion, but of total perversion. The Gospel says, 'Christ's kingdom is not of this world,' but the church has set up an earthly kingdom; Christ demands that his ministers shall not rule, but serve, but here the priests govern the world; Christ leads his disciples away from political and ceremonious religion and places every man face to face with God—God and the soul, the soul and its God; but here, on the contrary, man is bound to an earthly institution with chains that cannot be broken, and he must obey; it is only when he obeys that he approaches God. There

was a time when Roman Christians shed their blood because they refused to do worship to Cæsar, and rejected religion of the political kind; today they do not, indeed actually pray to an earthly ruler, but they have subjected their souls to the despotic orders of the Roman papal King."[1]

Although the liberal thus openly challenges and opposes Catholicism, he is not guilty of the overweening intellectual and spiritual arrogance that would treat disrespectfully such a tremendous system, with its long history of power and splendor, its unquestionable lordship over the souls and lives of multitudes of devout people, and its indubitable capacity to satisfy the holy longings of many people after God. Criticize it, as liberal Christians may and must, to fail in respect for it would be to expose themselves to the charge of light-mindedness. Rather would they join in the kindly and generous judgment of Dr. Edwin Hatch, who, after clearly demonstrating that Catholicism springs from the mystery cults of the early Christian centuries, rather than from the New Testament, goes on to say:

"The tendency to an elaborate ceremonial which had produced the magnificence of these mysteries and cults, and which had combined with the love of a purer faith and the tendency toward fellowship, was based upon a tendency of human nature which was not crushed by Christianity. It rose to a new life, and, though it lives only by a survival, it lives that new life still. In the splendid ceremonial of Eastern and Western worship, in the blaze of lights, in the

[1] Harnack, *What is Christianity*, pp. 262, 263.

separation of the central point of the rite from common view, in the procession of torchbearers chanting their sacred hymns—there is the survival, and in some cases the galvanized survival, of what I cannot find it in my heart to call a *pagan* ceremonial; because though it was the expression of a less enlightened faith yet it was offered to God from a heart that was not less earnest in its search for God and in its effort after holiness than our own."[2]

But authoritarian religion assumes another form also. Protestantism did not get rid of external authority at the Reformation. There remained, as a powerful and largely controlling factor in the great Protestant bodies, what we may call *dogmatic authoritarianism.*

In the place of an infallible Church, Protestant theology set an infallible Bible. Rightly understood it was a wholesome and necessary exchange. Obviously, if there is to be any real unity in the church, any protection against anarchy, there must be some accepted standard to which all "private interpretations," varying ideals, and judgments of men may be brought for regulation; and it is wise and necessary to accept, as such standard, to which all is to be brought for ultimate judgment, the "Word of God, contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament." Indeed, the Catholic appeals to the Bible as the ultimate authority, of which the Church is only the infallible and necessary interpreter. But very soon appeared a tendency to make of the Bible something more than a trustworthy guide for individual faith and conduct, and an accepted

[2] Hatch, *Hibbert Lectures*, 1888, p. 309.

standard for common thought and life and worship. It was set in the place of the living Church, and all that had been claimed for the Church was now urged in behalf of the Bible. It began to be urged that it possessed an authority which was to be implicitly obeyed on all subjects on which it touched, even incidentally.

This was the theory, but in practice the theologians and creed-makers laid down the sense in which the Bible should be taken, formulated its doctrines, and then claimed that the authority of the Bible extended to the doctrinal system thus derived by them from the Bible. Such a method and procedure the Bible nowhere dreams of sanctioning. So, while the reformers insisted in theory on the Bible as supreme authority, a significant fact about the Reformation was the number of elaborate creeds which appeared; Confessio Gallica, Confessio Belgica; Canons of Dort; Thirty-nine Articles; Westminster Confession; Augsburg Confession; Heidelberg Catechism, and, lying back of them all, Calvin's Institutes of the Christian Religion. The reformers went far and saw far for their day. We should honor them for daring so much and doing so well, rather than blame them for not reaching perfection. But we ought to be able to see clearly, what they did not, that their daring faith in the Bible as the "only" standard would be first lowered and finally vitiated by the growing insistence on rigid doctrinal standards as the authoritative interpretations of the Bible. Authoritarian Protestantism is guilty of a fundamental inconsistency. The Roman Church has always contended, with telling force, that an infallible book would be practically useless, or even dangerous,

without an infallible Church to interpret it. And the contention is just, to this extent at least, that there is no proper halting place between confidence in the Bible itself, just as it is, freely studied, coupled with cheerful acceptance of the equal rights of many varying interpretations, and the Roman doctrine of one infallible interpretation offered by an authoritative Church. The truth is that the reformers did not dare trust themselves to the faith in the Bible which they began by so splendidly affirming. They still clung to the necessity of a regulative authority; but they located it in the writings of individual doctors of theology, or in creeds formed by different special groups and parties in the Church.

There is this to be said in justification of Protestantism, that the best of its creeds heartily disclaim their own final authority, offering themselves simply as particular statements of belief. They affirm the superior right of the Bible to serve as a regulative authority. Paradoxical as it may be, the statement is true that he who loyally subscribes to the Westminster Confession of Faith, for example, and then honestly finds the teaching of the Bible to be different from the teaching of that creed, can be truly loyal to the creed only by denying it and holding to what he finds in the Bible; for the fundamental position of the creed is that the Bible alone is authoritative.

But this is a position at once too daring and too subtle to be taken and acted upon wholeheartedly by all Protestants. And, therefore, we have today a large and strong section of Protestantism as completely authoritarian in spirit as is the Roman Church itself. Professing to take the Bible as the sufficient and sole au-

thority, it proceeds to define the Bible teaching in authoritative terms, and to sum up the teaching of the Bible in a set of doctrines which one questions at his peril, and must accept implicitly or be denied the fellowship of the Church.

This dogmatic authoritarianism is a strange phenomenon, and leads to strange developments. If authority resides not only in the Bible, but in some particular doctrinal construction of Biblical teaching, some particular creedal arrangement of Biblical truth, anything like unity in the Church today becomes a futile dream. Indeed, the way is open to a rampant sectarianism, the logical issue of which would be a separate denomination for every man who is minded to insist on his own creed as Gospel truth. There is a story of a Scotchman, proud of his name, who said, "Wherever you find a McLeod you will find a Presbyterian Church;" to which some one instantly made the retort, "Yes, and wherever you find two McLeods, you will find two Presbyterian Churches." That story loses the grace of humor, and becomes a grim tragedy, if the logic of Protestant authoritarianism be followed to the end. A Professor in one of our American theological schools, in a published article, says, "Is the Westminster Confession a purely denominational affair? It is not—to those who believe it to be true. Those who believe it to be true will never be satisfied until it has been accepted by the whole world, and will never consent to be limited in the propagation of it by any Church or union of Churches whatsoever."

The judgment of one of our wisest Church leaders is none too severe when, commenting on the statement just

quoted, he says: "While this condition prevails, to talk of church union is a mere waste of words; to attempt to reconcile Christianity and modern culture is a futile task" (Richards, *Christian Ways of Salvation,* page 220).

These two types of authoritarianism are closer together in spirit, and in essential nature, than either of them will admit. The Protestant authoritarian will vehemently deny that anything in him is akin to the Romanist; and the Roman Catholic will look with contempt on the Protestant who rejects the authority of the Mother Church, and then attempts to enforce the doctrinal positions of a sect. But at heart their position is the same. The liberal Christian detects the same fallacy in both, refuses to wear the yoke of either, because he denies the validity of that external authority which one and the other claims with solemnity and attempts to enforce with vigor. Of the one, as of the other, the liberal Christian "asks the title deeds," and marvels at the weak and evasive answer given him. As weak as is the basis, in his judgment, for the extravagant Roman claims of power bestowed on Peter and transmitted to popes; of a Church thus kept from error through all the ages and therefore entitled to implicit obedience from all the faithful; just as weak, in the judgment of the liberal Christian, is the claim of Protestant authoritarians that the Bible freely interpreted in the light thrown on it by unfettered investigation and criticism, is insufficient, and therefore must be supplemented by certain creeds, enforced upon the consciences of Christians as authoritative. Gladly does the liberal accept the great creeds of the Church as noble attempts to give ex-

pression to spiritual experience, and to register progress in Christian thought and feeling up to the time of their promulgation. But with absolute positiveness he affirms that to make any such creeds or any system of doctrine divinely authoritative, is to do violence to the very spirit and genius of Protestantism, and to belittle the Bible and its true authority. He subscribes to a creed, when he does so at all, only in the way of general consent, and as a necessary means of visible unity. He sees also, with a clearness that brooks no denial, that any united testimony of Protestantism on the basis of dogmatic authoritarianism is hopeless. Who shall decide which doctrines are essential, which are Scriptural and therefore authoritative? Is each denomination or group of Christians to have the prerogative of the veto? That way lies chaos. Yet what other solution is there to suggest? No, Protestantism must abandon this whole policy of enforced dogmatic authority.

The whole claim to an external and infallible authority rests upon an unwarranted assumption. It cannot stand the test of right reason, of historical investigation, of critical study of sources. Dogmatic authoritarianism relies on sheer credulity and blind affirmation, as truly, if not as obviously, as does the sacramental and institutional authoritarianism of the Roman Church. This is so palpably true that it is hard to see how any thoroughgoing authoritarian can keep himself from being carried over into Rome. He cannot, save by an arbitrary exercise of choice.

In the very remarkable and convincing series of lectures to which reference has already been made—a piece of scholarship which put the whole religious world in

debt to its author[3]—Dr. Hatch concludes his study of the influence of Greek thought and custom on the early development of Christianity, with the clear statement that "a large part of what are sometimes called Christian doctrines, and many usages which have prevailed and continue to prevail in the Christian Church, are in reality Greek theories and Greek usages, changed in form and color by the influence of primitive Christianity, but in essence Greek still." He then expresses his conviction that two theories are possible in dealing with this fact of the composite origin and development of what we know as Christianity. On the one hand, it may be urged that these additions to the Christianity of Jesus and of the New Testament are non-essential additions, and that Christianity may throw off these Hellenic (and he might have added Hebraic) accretions, and be "none the loser," but rather stand out again before the world in "the uncoloured majesty of the Gospels." On the other hand, it may be urged that "the tree of life, which was planted by the hand of God Himself in the soil of human society, was intended from the first to grow by assimilating to itself whatever elements it found there. It is possible to hold that it is the duty of each succeeding age at once to accept the developments of the past, and to do its part in bringing on the developments of the future."

He then makes the calm assertion, "Between these two main views it does not seem possible to find a logical basis for a third. The one or the other must be accepted, with the consequences which it involves."

In these wise, daring words, he has indicated the abid-

[3] Hatch, *Hibbert Lectures*, 1888.

ing difference which may well mark a true Catholicism, and a true Protestantism, a religion which always goes back for its authority to the undoubted sources of its faith in the New Testament, and one that with equal frankness accepts the later elements incorporated in the process of the historical evolution of doctrine and usage. Such a Catholicism would be a progressive Catholicism; and such a Protestantism would be a historically based Protestantism. They would be mutually helpful, complementary to each other; and there would be every reason to look for ultimate mutual respect, and a large measure of co-operation.

But when the learned author says that "between these two main views it does not seem possible to find a logical basis for a third," his judgment overlooks the outstanding fact that a third position is held by the great majority of professing Christians—for men are not logical. Most of them are quite satisfied to get along without a "logical basis" for their religion. Great masses of Christians are content to base their religion on a blind affirmation, which a true Protestant is reluctant to call "faith." In the case of the Catholic authoritarian, the affirmation required to be accepted is that all that the Church has taught, and teaches now, and shall teach through coming ages, lay implicitly in the original "deposit of faith," given by the Head of the Church to His authorized representatives as the sole custodians of the grace of God. The similar affirmation insisted upon by the Protestant authoritarian is that certain doctrines, selected as essential by decrees of ecclesiastical bodies, or by the insistency of certain theologians, are to be taken as essential to true Christianity. In either form,

and in the case of any such authoritarianism in the Church, no proof, no warrant, no ground of acceptance goes with it; nothing save an arbitrary demand for the assent of the human will in blind submission to an unfounded claim.

Of course it is within the power of the will of the individual to divest itself of judgment and submit to irrational claims; and any ecclesiastical body has the power, and the legal right, to require some such form of submission, of blind affirmation, as a condition of good standing, if such a course does not run counter to its constitution. But whether a soul calling itself Christian has the right to make such a surrender of reason and conscience, whether a body calling itself Christian has the right to make such a demand, is another and a very serious question. One clear mark of the liberal Christian is that he denies this right.

At the other extreme from the authoritarian in all his varieties, we find that group of religious persons and institutions which we call *humanitarian.*

Names are, at best, "kittle cattle," elusive and hard to control. The word "humanitarian" is used here to designate those who in large part, or on the whole, give up the idea of divine authority and divine grace; who think of religion, and of Christianity in particular, as a system of ethical principles and practical ideals, as a matter of working out one's character, controlling one's conduct, living one's life, by the forces within one's own nature, and in obedience to the physical and spiritual laws that rule in the universe. In the startlingly strong

expression of Horace Bushnell, the humanitarian thinks of religion as the achievement of personal character, with a little help from "that very excellent person, Jesus."

The humanitarian is deeply concerned over the social, civic, political, and international bearings and outworkings of religion. But God for him is wholly entangled in the process; a God of humanity, yes, often a God who is just the ideal or sum of humanity.

The humanitarian acknowledges no seat of authority save that which resides in the individual soul, or perhaps in the social group. The Bible is to him as other books, and Jesus as other great souls, prophets and leaders. God to him is pretty nearly synonymous with "nature." The only way God can work with man, or help toward individual or social progress or salvation is through man's discovery of the laws of nature, and co-operation with them. The humanitarian has a large confidence in what he means by the words "progress" and "evolution," as connoting natural forces making for betterment, forces we can use. Religion becomes merged in ethics; it is right and lawful living. A distinguished representative of this extreme position once said to me: "It is a sufficient religion for me to know that the universe is rational, and I must not play the fool in it."

Of course there are many varieties and gradations in this "humanitarian" type of Christianity. I have presented its extreme form. It veers by imperceptible degrees from the position of the one who finds his religion in searching the Gospel and trying to follow the teachings and example of Jesus, to the position of the

agnostic or thoroughly naturalistic soul, whose religion is nothing more than a vague purpose and honest effort to keep clean and do right.

We all know a considerable number of people, for the most part earnest, honest folk, who belong to this general group which we call "humanitarian." As we said of the authoritarian, even the extreme Catholic, so do we say of the humanitarian, even the extreme agnostic, that generous recognition and hearty respect for the genuine character of his faith and practice is his due from us who hold the Christian faith. Indeed it should not be hard to see that one who, while lacking any real trust in a Personal God and in divine grace, nevertheless does keep his life true and clean in the dim light in which he moves, is entitled to peculiar respect, however much we may pity him for what he lacks.

For he does lack the very heart of religion, which is "the life of God in the soul of man." It is a terrible situation to be alone in the world, without a friendly God and Father. There appeared recently a bit of verse which expresses this loneliness of the agnostic soul:

> "Now that the gods are gone,
> And the kings, the gods' shadows are gone,
> Man is alone in the world,
> Thrust out with the stars, and alone.
>
> And his eye takes in beauty and grief,
> And the centuries coming or flown;
> He is lord of all things and thoughts,
> —And a *fool*, and *alone*."

Opponents and critics of liberal Christianity are apt to class the liberal with the humanitarian. The charge is common that the liberal, for all his use of

well-known phrases and terms, at heart trusts not in God, but in himself, and in impersonal "nature"; that the religion which he holds is in essence nothing more than ethics.

There is, to be sure, extensive variation of view within the group known as liberal. That word, no less than the term "humanitarian," covers a wide range. And liberalism when it grows slack does undoubtedly tend by imperceptible grades to fall away into bare-faced naturalism, just as authoritarianism glides over into sheer superstition. But the stand taken by the representative liberal Christian is far removed from the position which I have described under the name "humanitarian."

Liberal Christianity, in fact, stands between the authoritarian type and the humanitarian. It shares somewhat in the qualities and experiences of both. Other characteristic, and even fundamental, positions of each it rejects just as decisively.

The liberal Christian is heartily one with the humanitarian in his conviction that conduct is of weighty, even of primary importance, and that emphasis upon the ethical side of life is inseparable from any true conception of religion. He is one with him in seeing in life a great arena for the exercise of the human will, of freedom of choice, and personal courage. He agrees with him in putting strong emphasis on social duties, and on the necessity of interweaving religion through the common and co-operative life. He shares his assurance that this world as we have it is the expression and outworking of a power that makes for righteousness; and that he who conforms with the laws of nature and of the

soul will be apt to find the world a safe and good place in which to live.

But the true liberal Christian cannot share in the humanitarian's attitude of self-trust, nor in his cheerful assurance that, unaided, man can attain to that rich, high development of character that is worthy to be called "salvation." Nor can the liberal endorse the hope that men can build by their own efforts the Kingdom of Heaven on earth; or that the calm, irresistible force known as "progress" or "evolution," working by methods well nigh or quite mechanical, can ever reduce all chaos finally to order and bring good to all.

In a word, the points at which the liberal breaks with the humanitarian can all be determined by reference to the guiding principle brought out in the previous chapter: that the liberal Christian puts all his faith and all his interest in personality. So far from looking upon himself and other men as the only personal forces or realities in the world, he sees the outworking of the will of the Father in all life. Life can never be to him, therefore, an unaided struggle, as it so readily becomes to the extreme humanitarian. He admires the dogged courage with which the humanitarian keeps up his faith in himself; but in place of such whistling to keep up courage, the liberal Christian sings hymns to God, knowing that he is heard, and that help comes from the silent and secret places of the Most High. His confidence is in God, not in himself; in God, not in impersonal processes of nature; in God, Who works through nature, and lives in the soul of man, and is ever ready to respond to faith. He believes that back of our life, and of

the entire life of the universe, is that God of whom the ancient writer of the Chronicles of Israel wrote so nobly, when he declared, "The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the earth, to show himself strong on behalf of him whose heart is perfect toward Him." The very essence of the liberal's religion is personal trust in the personal God and Father of our spirits, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The liberal Christian also parts company with the humanitarian in that he has an unreserved and thoroughgoing acceptance of the practical and spiritual authority of the Bible and of Christ. Here he approaches nearer to the authoritarian, and shares with him the joy of confidence in a standard and a Lord worthy of full trust, worthy even of being entrusted with the eternal destinies of the soul.

It is not too much to claim that the liberal Christian has a sense of the authority of the Bible, and of the lordship of Christ, as strong and as practically valid as that professed by the authoritarian. But, as has been suggested earlier in this discussion, and as anyone who looks at the matter can readily see for himself, the liberal Christian is content to ground his faith in the authority of the Bible and of Christ on a practical and spiritual basis. Why does he take the Bible as his guide? Because it is given him by a Church divinely constituted, and vested with authority? No; for he knows that there is no such Church. Because the Bible is declared by the creeds to be infallible, and to possess divine authority? No; for the truth is the reverse—the creeds derive all their force from the Word of God, and from

the spiritual experience of believers, and cannot in any possible way guarantee that which guarantees them.

Why then does he accept the Bible as authoritative? Simply and solely because of what it is, and of what it does; because, to use Coleridge's classic phrase, "it finds us." The liberal Christian knows no other proof. The authoritarian uneasily asks, "But what of those to whom it does not appeal, those whom it does not 'find'? How do you prove or enforce, in their case, the authority of the Scriptures?" The liberal Christian answers readily and cheerfully: "I do not. If a man declares that he does not find God and divine authority in the Bible, I know no way to make him admit that it is there. 'He that hath ears to hear, let him hear, and he that hath eyes to see, let him see.' What gain can there be in thundering at him in tones of self-assertive authority? If he will not consent of himself to bow in the presence of God, can the voice of any human authority bend his back?"

The liberal Christian finds comfort and light in this matter of the authority of the Bible in two places; in the best creeds of the Reformation period, and in music. It gives him keen satisfaction to discover that the great creeds of early Protestantism rest their majestic affirmations of the authority of the Word of God ultimately on the sole fact of the spiritual appeal of the Bible itself. The Westminster Confession of Faith, which stands out amid the Reformation symbols for rugged strength, as well as for persistence as a living power, takes that position, with a definiteness remarkable in a document from that early period. In terms unequivocal and decisive, it states:

"We may be moved and induced by the testimony of the Church to a high and reverent esteem of the Holy Scripture; and the heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, the majesty of the style, the consent of all the parts, the scope of the whole (which is to give all glory to God), the full discovery it makes of the only way of man's salvation, the many other incomparable excellencies, and the entire perfection thereof, are arguments whereby it doth abundantly evidence itself to be the Word of God; yet, notwithstanding, our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority thereof is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit, bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts."

It lays down the principle that obscure parts of the Scriptures are to be interpreted by those parts of the Scriptures whose meaning is plain and clear and not by an authoritative church, pope, or council, nor by an authoritative creed; and while it entrusts the Bible to the common sense of simple folk, it sanctions also and demands the best and fullest study of it in the original languages, in a way which amply justifies the statement that the modern critical historical research movement bears the stamp of its approval. And it declares, in the last section of its noble chapter on the Scriptures, that "The Supreme Judge, by whom all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scriptures"—not the Bible as a lawbook, or a set

of inerrant statements, but the Bible as a vehicle and expression of the living Spirit of the Living God.

To the liberal Christian, music offers one of the clearest analogies to religion in the matter of authority, as in many other details. No authority in all the world is more certain, more absolute, more universally accepted in its own domain, or more securely based, than the authority of the great masters of music and of their masterpieces. No sovereigns of any other realm ever reigned with authority more unquestioned and unquestionable than that of Bach or Beethoven. Yet on what does their authority rest? Has any court ever sat on the subject and rendered a decision? Has any council of musicians ever met and solemnly declared their works to be the seat of authority in music? The authority resides in the music itself, in the appeal, instant, irresistible, permanent, that it makes to every normal musical nature. It "finds" the music lover. That is the sole and sufficient proof of its authority. Though millions of men should agree together to condemn and reject it, no true musical soul would waver in his conviction that they had all really condemned not the music but themselves.

Exactly such by nature is the authority of the Bible, and the nature of its proof. All sorts of external evidences and aids to belief are offered. There is only one proof that holds—the response of the human heart to the appeal of the Word of God, and its demonstrated power to guide men, individually and in groups, to holy, loving, godly living. It *is* what we need, and it *does* what we need to have done. To the doubter, the liberal Christian says, "Try it and see!" He offers no other proof, because he knows there is no other.

In his attitude to Christ also, the liberal Christian stands between the attitude of the authoritarian and that of the humanitarian. He shares in the humanitarian's regard for Christ as the prince of teachers, and his insistence that the words of the Master are precepts meant for our actual guidance. But when the humanitarian says, with Nicodemus, "Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God," the liberal Christian waits with eager joy for the answer he knows will come, "Verily I say unto you, Ye must be born again." Something more is needed than acceptance of teaching, however luminous and beautiful; more than self-effort, however painstaking and heroic. The soul must be renewed, God must come in, Christ must dwell in the heart by faith. For the liberal Christian does not share in the serene self-confidence characteristic of the extreme humanitarian. He knows himself to be weak, sinful, erring. He is sure that his only way of salvation is through humble trust in the grace of God, revealed to us in Jesus Christ, and communicated to us by the Holy Spirit. Therefore he prays and trusts, and seeks in Christ not only a teacher from the past to revere, but a dear presence now. It is the personality of Christ that means most, yea, all, to him. "What Christ was, God always is; what Christ did, God always does." That is his ultimate faith, the secret of his character, his life, his religion.

Yet he will not join the authoritarian in his acceptance of all that the creeds may have said about Christ. Rather should we say that, however much of it he may accept, he will never be led by the authoritarian into the serious error of reckoning one's intellectual construction

of Christ the primary consideration, or into the fatal error of putting dogma in the place of importance that rightly belongs to life, to spiritual experience. "I have a life in Christ to live," expresses the one decisive conviction of the liberal Christian. Christ is a fact in this life we are living; a fact of history out of the past; yes, thank God! But, thank God even more, a history-making fact *now,* so that "the life that I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me," who loves me still, and by taking up His abode with me in the Spirit, gives Himself for and to me now, today. It is in that present, vital, spiritual experience of Christ's abiding presence with him that the liberal Christian finds the deepest reality of his religion, and the strongest assurance of its truth and authority. Here is something that anyone can test for himself, a repeatable and verifiable experience, as truly such as any process the scientist puts to the test in his laboratory. He who will make a *bona fide* experiment of trust in God as revealed in Jesus will find joy and peace, cleansing and vigor, a life that is life indeed. And while the humanitarian may call these convictions and experiences imaginary, mystical *aberglaube,* and to the authoritarian they may seem dangerously vague and unfounded and uncertain, the liberal Christian knows no fear, for his faith rests where that of the great Apostle reposed securely: "Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal; the Lord knoweth them that are His, and, let everyone that nameth the name of Christ depart from all iniquity." In an experience of personal fellowship with God, realized primarily and evidenced all the way along in a

pure and loving life according to Christ, is the real essence of religion. Here the liberal Christian finds his authority; here he finds his freedom; for here he finds God, and his life is hid here with Christ—hid as the roots are hidden in the soil, in order that they may bring forth in the light of day visible fruits of righteousness, peace, love, joy, and self-control.

CHAPTER IV

LIBERAL CHRISTIANITY AND THE NEW TESTAMENT

One of the most important and significant facts about liberal Christianity is often slighted or wholly ignored. It is missed completely by many of the critics of modern developments in Christian theology and religion. It is the fact that one of the chief roots or sources of liberal Christianity is the religion of the New Testament. Critics of liberalism in religion give large place to the allegation that liberal Christians make light of the Bible, and are in reality seeking to get away from its high ethical standards and doctrinal statements, while, for safety's sake, professing allegiance to those statements and standards.

Nothing could be further from the truth. It is fidelity to the New Testament which has led liberal Christians into many of their most characteristic positions. An ecclesiastical world, placidly secure in its accepted ideas and creeds, never doubting that in them was the very truth of God as revealed in the Scriptures, was suddenly and rudely shaken by the storms of new knowledge and keen criticism which broke and beat upon their ark in the latter half of the nineteenth century. We cannot wonder that it seemed to many as if all things were being shaken, and that they murmured the old words, "If the foundations be destroyed, what shall the righteous do?" But, by the mercy of God, and under the loving guidance of His Spirit of all truth, there came to their assistance at the same time the popular exten-

sion of critical and historical knowledge of the Scriptures. Men began to study the New Testament afresh and thus to know it as it never had been known and studied before. Clearer and clearer has grown the conviction that what has really suffered in the storm has been, not Christianity, not the New Testament, but certain theological constructions of the New Testament truth which were partial and temporary in value and character. Men have come to a new appraisal of the Lord Jesus and His great follower, Paul, and of the words which they spoke or wrote. And true liberal Christianity, in very much of that in which it differs from the accepted orthodoxy of past years, has changed not through going away from the New Testament, but through going further into that precious volume; not through ignoring its teachings, but through mastering them more fully and clearer of misunderstandings. The liberal Christian has come to see that much which has passed for essential Christianity is but faintly indicated in the New Testament, if at all, coming rather from extracanonical sources. The comparatively new and vitally important study of Hellenic cults and mystery religions and their influence upon the development of Christian doctrine and practice, has made us aware that much which has been uncritically taken as part and parcel of original Christianity was wrought into the fabric of the creeds and customs of the early Church in the course of that curious and marvelous development of the first few centuries which issued in Catholic Christianity; and that a large part of these developments was taken over by Protestantism at the time of the Reformation.

We are just fully wakening to the fact that what we

call Christianity is a complex and varicolored movement. It has gathered to itself much that is strange during its course through the ages. The Mississippi River flows on its way clear and bright toward the gulf, until the enormous muddy flood of the Missouri pours into it; and from that point on, while it still bears the name of Mississippi, it bears the aspect of the turgid torrent that has swept into it and changed its course and character. Even so the rich, earthy, sluggish flood of the religions of the Orient came pouring into the crystal-clear current of primitive Christianity; and the resultant river, while it goes on bearing the name Christianity, has caught and retained much of the aspect and character of the inflowing streams.

We know today the facts about the Gospels and the other New Testament literature, as men have not known them in any period of past time since apostolic days. We see Jesus as no others in that same long interval have been privileged to see Him. We read in Paul's words what none of these others has been able to find in them. And it is from this new knowledge, this new appreciation of the meaning of the New Testament, that liberal Christianity has come to take shape. The claim is not too extreme that liberal Christianity is nearer to the true religion of Jesus and Paul than any other main movement in the Church today, very much nearer than either of the two extreme positions—the authoritarian and the humanitarian—with which we contrasted it in previous chapters.

That may seem an overbold claim. But I believe it may be substantiated; that any honest student, who will trust implicitly to the plain verdict of facts, and to

the guidance of the Spirit of God, will come to see the truth of it.

To attempt to show, in complete and full fashion, that liberal Christianity is in agreement with the faith of the New Testament would be a task quite beyond the capacity of the present writer. There are books which render this service as I could not hope to do, notably the lectures delivered at Auburn Seminary by Professor Richards and published under the title of *Christian Ways of Salvation;* and, from an earlier time, but of value quite independent of time, Harnack's *What Is Christianity?* Very valuable also is Deissmann's *The Religion of Jesus and the Faith of Paul.*

All I can hope to do within my space limits here and the limitations of my own non-professional equipment in scholarship, is to indicate a few of the outstanding ways in which liberal Christianity fits closely into the ideals and teachings of the New Testament. I raise no critical questions about the sources. Let us take the New Testament as it stands, without attempting precise differentiations between the Synoptic Gospels and the Fourth Gospel, or between the religion of Jesus and the theology of Paul. Taking the New Testament thus in the large, as we have it, and taking liberal Christianity in the large, as we know it, let us see how they compare and whether, on the main points, they agree.

Of course the question here is not whether we can make liberal Christianity square with this or that isolated text, or with some series of specially selected passages. It is a favorite habit of those who cling inflexibly to the truth and authority of the older orthodoxy to select a few sayings and call them the essence of the

Gospel and of New Testament Christianity, and then to judge all the rest of the New Testament and all theological and religious teaching by those sayings. We mean to deal with the real drift of the New Testament as a whole, with the main current of its teaching.

In such a brief study two controlling considerations may well be observed. The first is that the most important issue is between liberal Christianity and the extreme conservative theology. It is from this group that the attacks upon the liberal mainly come. Yet it is with this same group that the liberal Christian finds his closest affinities in spirit and aim. One of the most decisive questions to be determined is whether liberal Christianity can justify itself as being at least as near to the New Testament position as is the established orthodoxy in its extreme form.

The second consideration is that that which gives tone to any religion, that which is the heart and essence of any form of theology, is its conception of salvation and of the way in which it is secured. Any religious movement that claims to be Christian must be judged supremely by its position with regard to how men are saved, and what salvation is.

We shall do the best that can be done in so brief a time, and so small a compass, if we contrast the way of salvation held by the extreme conservative wing of the Church with the way of salvation as the liberal Christian sees it.

The established authoritarian view of salvation is that its meaning and content are chiefly eschatological, and that the way and means to its attainment are through faith in the substitutionary atonement of Christ.

To be more precise, salvation is to be defined and understood as meaning chiefly the attainment of life beyond death. It is mainly concerned with something which is to come to pass in the future. It is not without significance that so frequently extreme conservatism in theology is closely associated with fervent faith in the second coming of Christ. When the word "salvation" is used, instinctively the mind of the conservative, the spirit of the premillennarian, turns to the thought of death, the second coming, judgment, heaven. It is in these circles of thought and feeling that that curious petition lingers longest, "Save us at last."

There are of course many individuals who hold tenaciously to conservative views in theology who would deny, perhaps with some heat, that their conception of salvation is eschatological. They would assert that to them salvation means something present and not deferred. But when asked what that something is, they find it hard, if not impossible, to specify. It is "salvation from sin," they say, yet they hesitate to profess that the Christian is sinless in face of clear facts to the contrary. It is freedom from guilt, peace of mind, they say. And in that they are at one with the liberal Christian. But in that case they are noting certain effects, rather than exhibiting the very nature of salvation. They object strongly to the statement that "salvation is character." So does the liberal Christian. But they find it very hard to point out any real connection between their conception of salvation and the sacrifice of Christ, without its being, in the last analysis, eschatological in its meaning.

With regard to the means, or the way of salvation,

they hold firmly to a somewhat elaborate scheme of doctrine as indicating the process of Christian salvation.

The essentials of this process are: first, that all men were involved in Adam's original sin, or fall, and remain so to this day; not merely by sharing with him in a common human inheritance, but by being specifically involved in the guilt of that first sin, through a "covenant" made with Adam in which he acted "not only for himself, but for his posterity."

Second: that, as a result of this fall, all men are out of touch with God, and are under His "wrath and curse," which will issue in eternal torment for them unless they be delivered from this deadly peril of the "wrath to come."

Third: that, for restoration to divine favor and to assurance of eternal life, the wrath of God must be placated, and the justice of God vindicated; and that through the death of Christ as a sacrifice a way was found "to satisfy divine justice," a transaction in which He took the guilt of the sinner upon Himself, and suffered in the sinner's stead.

Fourth: that in this sacrifice, as the guilt of the sinner is imputed to Christ so the righteousness of Christ is imputed to the sinner, in order that he may be accounted righteous in the sight of God. In due course, actual righteousness and sanctification follow.

What, on the other hand, is the liberal conception of the meaning and way of salvation? That is not so easy to make clear; in part because liberal Christianity ranges freely and dislikes fences and corrals; in part also because it deals with vital processes, which are always

harder to grasp and define than intellectual formulas, or facts of history.

The liberal Christian agrees with the traditionalist in the acceptance of certain aspects of the "doctrines of grace." He is as earnestly sure as any upholder of the doctrine of original sin, that all men are bound in one bundle of life, that our nature is in large part the inherited product of the past; that the roots of our sinfulness go back to the beginning of human life. He is sure that sin cannot lead to anything but curse and misery in the universe of the Righteous and Holy God, and that the one real problem in life is how to get rid of sin, in the individual and in social life. He knows that God hates sin, and that no one can be in fellowship with God who is on good terms with sin.

He is also convinced, as fervently so as any conservative can be, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, and that "there is none other name in which we can be saved." He ascribes to Christ the name and office of the "One Mediator." But he frankly avows that forensic, governmental, and strictly substitutionary theories of how Christ brings about salvation mean little or nothing to him; they seem inadequate, unworthy, and artificial, in a world which is at heart a matter of personal relationships. These older theories seem necessarily to represent God as Judge, Sovereign, or some other sort of public official. And, to one who feels that God is the Father, that life is essentially personal, and that the world is God's home, representations of God as Judge or Sovereign are as incongruous, as unsatisfying and distasteful, in thinking of salvation, as it would be to bring into a home and make operative in

its ongoing the ordered ritual and mechanical procedure of a law court or a monarch's presence-chamber.

It is not that the liberal Christian has a cheap or easy-going sense of sin. But the root evil and essence of sin, as he sees it, is not a law broken, a judge offended, a monarch or magistrate angered. It is rather a personal relationship broken, a heart wounded, a disastrous failure in personal duty and privilege. Is that taking a lighter view of sin? He only can say so who counts his public relations more important than his real, inner dealings with his own household and friends.

To the liberal Christian, therefore, much of the fabric of the substitutionary theology, its elaborate talk of "covenants," of offended justice, of accounts kept, of satisfaction to be rendered, of imputation whereby guilt and righteousness are "reckoned" to others than to those to whom they naturally belong, of transmitted guilt from Adam's first sin, much of this is felt and seen to be, not untrue so much as unreal, dealing with shadows rather than with the substance. The less elaborate and the more simple the approach can be made between a good father and a bad child, the more hope there is of success in the re-establishment of right relations. It may be necessary for the father to be severe, or even to seem merciless. His must be the long-sighted love that can exert to the full that sternness that brings "the far-off interest of tears." Certainly the father must suffer with and for the sinful child, and must make known to the child how deeply he suffers. There must be no compromise, however, as to the necessity of being right, and no limit can be set to what the father will do to help his child back to right personal relations

again. But to the liberal Christian, a student of social life, it seems very clear that the failures of the existing machinery of legal and governmental procedure of our human contriving, are altogether due to the mixture of the impersonal and the low grade personal in their make-up and administration. Indeed, of late the introduction of juvenile courts, courts of domestic relations, and the like, shows a desire on the part of our officials to correct this situation. In the face of this new tendency in criminal practice, to retain in our thought of the relations between God and man the atmosphere of the old-time court room seems unworthy and reactionary—lowering to the real dignity and glory of God.

The religion of the liberal Christian is, as we have said, wholly based on personality at its highest and personal relationships at their best.

To him, therefore, salvation is that life of fellowship with God for which man was made; a never-ending, ever-deepening friendship with the eternal Father; it is experiencing the *joy* of being holy and loving; not merely the *effort* to be good and loving: not that at all. The liberal Christian is as sure as his conservative brother that salvation is by faith, not by works; that true righteousness is never self-righteousness. To be saved is to enter into the joy of unconscious, instinctive rightness of living, with deep inward harmony of spirit, and in true fellowship with God and with man.

As to the way of salvation, the means and method by which it comes, the liberal Christian is sure that it comes by the direct action of the spirit of God within and upon the soul of man. Only God can bring us out of sin

into holiness, out of selfishness into mercy and loving kindness, out of disharmony into peace, out of death into life.

And the liberal Christian believes that in Jesus Christ we have at once and in one person the supreme approach of God to man, and the supreme approach of man to God. In Him we see the perfect realization of the human life that is one with God in absolute personal fellowship; in Him also we see God in all His love, goodness, inflexible righteousness, and tender sympathy. In His life we see what God is; in His death we see how far the love of God will go in its saving reach: in His life after death we see at once the evidence that he is one with the living God, and the earnestness of the promise that God "will not leave us in the dust."

It is "in Christ," "through Christ," that we can find salvation, the liberal Christian believes. For, when he says "salvation," his thoughts are not exclusively, or even chiefly, on the life to come, although his vision takes that in, too. Of life beyond death he can give no assurance, save to those who are "in Christ"; he is sure that to them eternal life is God's gift. But he cannot accept the monstrous notion that life beyond the grave is for those only who consciously "accept Christ" or believe a certain creed. The millions who have never heard of the Gospel, and the many who have heard its message in so poor and twisted a fashion that they have rejected what, really known, they would love—all these sons of men he is content to trust to the eternal goodness; for, to his mind God would not be worthy of man's trust if He would not do the best that can be done for every one of His children. He agrees with Paul that

God "will have all men to be saved." But the liberal Christian means, when he says that salvation comes "through Christ" or is found "in Christ," that the fullness of life in fellowship with God, for which man was made, comes surely and radiantly, now and forever, only through Jesus Christ. He is the "One Mediator," in the sense that He is the one in whom God and man meet and find each other. The liberal Christian, let it be frankly said, neither assigns nor grants to the death of Christ any such exclusive place as is given to it in the system of the dogmatic authoritarian. He makes much of it, as the climax and summing up of the life of Christ; as the sharpest, clearest revelation of God in his relation to sin and the sinner; an overwhelmingly appealing demonstration of how far the love of God will go, and how far the love of man should go, in suffering with and for the sinful. Indeed, the liberal Christian is not barred from the use of most, if not all, of the imagery with which the atoning death on Calvary has been set forth, provided he is free to use it as poetry, not as mathematics; as inspired song, not as cold logic.

Nevertheless, this is true above all, and all through: the liberal Christian does not think of, and cannot use, or rely on, the death of Christ apart from Christ's life, His teaching of the way and the truth, His resurrection, His present living grace, and the eternal experience of the Living God among men. Calvary is to him not simply a hill standing by itself, where something was done once, apart from human life as a whole, on which our salvation depends. It is true that what was done there was done once for all; there has been, there will be, there can be, no other Calvary. But the

glory of Calvary is that on that hill and on that day came to perfect, climacteric expression that which the living God is always doing; always showing love that conquers death and sin, grace that dies to save. Just as Jesus Christ is a definite, historic character, and yet derives His unique power and glory from the fact that what He was, God always is, and that now and ever men find God in Him; so the death of Christ is a definite, historic event, which yet derives its unique power and glory from the fact that what He did, God is always doing, and that now and ever men find their sins taken away by His love and grace, which will stop at no limits where the eternal good of man is involved.

Inadequate as is this statement of the liberal view of the meaning and means of salvation—a personal confession rather than an authoritative declaration—I believe it represents fairly well what most evangelical liberal Christians hold to be true about the salvation which is in Christ for us men. This is the faith which is preached from liberal evangelical pulpits.

Here, then, are the two views—the authoritarian and the liberal Christian. Our question is, now, which of these is nearer to the real teaching and spirit of the New Testament? Let the scope of the question be clearly seen and noted. It does not ask which of the two fits the creeds better. It is simply and solely a question of closer degree of conformity to the actual teaching of Jesus and Paul, and of the New Testament as a whole. What are the facts?

One is embarrassed here by the wealth of material, and the sheer impossibility of setting it forth in any satisfactory manner. In preparation for this particular

chapter, I spent many hours in reading the entire New Testament, and noting carefully every definite statement made in it with regard to the meaning and way of salvation. It was a work of grace, an amazing and uplifting spiritual experience. I beg all of my readers to do something similar. There is nothing more needed just now than that very many earnest Christians who love the Lord Jesus and genuinely desire to know His way of life and to forward His Kingdom, should go to the New Testament for themselves with open minds and see what its books say with regard to salvation, what it is, and how it comes.

It would take a long course of lectures, or a large volume, to do full justice to the teaching of the New Testament as to salvation. All I can hope to do is to present certain decisive conclusions to which this study has brought me. And I most earnestly beg all who read these words to adopt the method so successfully used in Berea, searching the Scriptures carefully to see whether these things are so. The New Testament itself, the word of the everlasting Gospel, must give the final decision.

What do we find?

Let us take the Gospels first; and for the purposes of this particular study, we need make no separation between the three Synoptic Gospels and the Fourth Gospel. As a matter of fact, added weight attaches to what we find in John if we look on it as a late book, which contains not only facts in the life of Christ, but theological reflections on that life and its meaning.

We find, first of all, not a hint of Adam's fall in the four Gospels, not a reference to it of any sort; not a

suggestion of any scheme of "covenants,"—"covenant of works," "covenant of grace." Of the whole doctrine of man's fall in Adam, and the transmission of original guilt therefrom, which bulks so large in dogmatic theology of the authoritarian type, not even a suggestion is discoverable in all the four Gospels.

The only approach I find in the four Gospels to this doctrine of transmitted guilt from Adam's fall is in the opening of the ninth chapter of John. There the disciples, seeing the blind man, ask whether his condition is due to the sin of his parents. Jesus declares that that does not enter into the case, and turns their attention from speculations about the past to the needs of the present. So far as I can discover there is but this one approach in the thought of the Gospels to the doctrine of Adam's fall and the transmission of original sin, and it is a very faint one, which, on the whole, counts against rather than for giving it a place of any importance in Christian doctrine.

We will anticipate somewhat and state here that nowhere else in the entire New Testament do we find any reference to Adam's fall, save in two passages in Paul's epistles. In one of these a parallelism is drawn which is far from congruous with the Adamic theory of original sin; for it declares that "as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive." If this parallel be taken literally, then it must mean all men in the one case as well as in the other. That interpretation lands us in Universalism.

As a matter of fact, when the statement is interpreted in its proper bearing, it does not lie open to the charge of sustaining Universalism. Anyone familiar with Paul's

thought and language knows that he uses the phrases "in Adam" and "in Christ" to designate states of spiritual experience. The verse thus means that all who are "in Adam," that is, in the natural, fleshly state of the soul, are dead; and that all who are "in Christ" are alive. But it is clear, if we take this view, that Paul views the being "in Adam" not as participation in the "guilt of his first transgression," but as the characteristic spiritual experience of the unredeemed soul. There is no hint whatsoever here of any intention to assert or imply that all men were potentially present when Adam sinned, or that they share the guilt of that first sin.

The other of the two passages is the fifth chapter of Romans. While it makes more of the figure of Adam, the simple fact is that no such thought as the imputation of sin or guilt enters into its language, taken at its face value. The thought, instead, is that all men share in sin, as universally as they share in the human nature that sins; that the sin they do is their own as much as is the bit of human nature with which they do it. Here also it is clearly stated that the gift of life is as universal as the heritage of death. As "the many" die, so "the many" are made righteous.

Even if we should grant that this classic passage means all that the covenant theology has taken it to mean, it would surely be questionable procedure to make so immense and weighty a dogma depend thus on a single passage. Add what is unquestionably true, that Paul was fond of poetic imagery for its illustrative value—delightfully expressed by a great modern scholar in the statement that had Paul been speaking to men of a

later day, his message would have been addressed not so much to theologians as to musicians, not to Anselm, but to John Sebastian Bach—and then revert to the fact that the passage in question is very far actually from supporting clearly the traditional interpretation, for it lends itself readily to alternative explanations, and this will seem a slender and frail peg on which to hang so large and heavy a doctrine as that of original sin and the fall in Adam. If that dogma were as centrally important as theologians of the older school have averred, would it not, like "the Kingdom of God," appear and reappear on page after page of the Gospels? Not a suggestion, or a shadowed hint of it is found in them. And would not Paul have given it fuller recognition? Theologians may defend the dogma of the fall of all men in Adam, and their consequent share in the guilt of original sin, as a creation of their own, on the basis of logic and argument. It cannot be maintained that it is an essential or important doctrine of New Testament teaching.

A similar statement can be made, well nigh as decisively, with regard to the absence from the four Gospels of the forensic doctrine of substitutionary atonement and the imputation of Christ's righteousness. Those who hold these doctrines to be essential or important elements of Christian truth may be successfully challenged to adduce any support for them from these four books. Abundant testimony is forthcoming in the four Gospels to the fact that Christ came into the world to save sinners; there is ample support for the assertion that His death is a powerful factor in that work of salvation; but no emphatic or unmistakable testimony in confirmation of any

forensic or governmental theory of justification, or of any strictly substitutionary view of the atonement. How amazing, therefore, is this insistence that something should be regarded as in a very special sense "the Gospel," which is nowhere emphasized or strongly stated in any one of the four Gospels!

Indeed, there is just one passage in all the Gospel material which can be quoted with even a shade of warrant in support of the extreme form in which the "doctrines of grace" are conceived by dogmatic authoritarianism; particularly the doctrine of substitutionary atonement. It is the saying of Jesus, reported in Matthew xx. 28 and Mark x. 45 that, "the Son of Man came to give His life a ransom for many." Unquestionably, the word "ransom," taken in its original and native sense, refers to a payment whereby one is set free from slavery, or captivity, or some evil condition. It is also a fact to which full weight should be given that our Lord here uses the preposition ἀντὶ, the root idea of which is "instead of," or "in place of," rather than ὑπὲρ, which means "on behalf of." This saying might, therefore, be brought forward as an exception to the general rule that the theological ideas of substitution or imputation are not found in the Gospels.

But fair-mindedness goes on to take into the account also certain other facts. Greek scholars tell us that good form requires the use of ἀντὶ with λύτρον; and that its use, therefore, in putting Jesus' words into Greek will not serve to determine the expression originally used by Him in Aramaic. It must also be admitted that the saying contains no hint as to the person to whom, or the way in which, the ransom is to be paid.

The substitutionary theory of atonement is only one way and not certainly the best way in which these two questions may be answered.

But the most decisive fact of all is that in this same connection our Lord acts as His own interpreter, by referring to His coming death as significant for two reasons: first, as setting forth the spirit in which He came, lived, and ministered; and second, as constituting an example to His followers. It is quite impossible to evade or escape the implications of the fact—more impressive in its simple directness than any amount of subtle theologizing—that our Lord introduces this statement with which we are dealing, of the meaning of His death, with the words "even as," or as quoted by Mark, "For the Son of Man *also*." If that means anything it means, "you too must be as I am, and do as I do; my death must show your spirit." This is exactly what Christ's greatest human interpreter does when he explains that his telling of Christ's "equality with God" and His "death on the cross" has been done for the purpose of emphasizing the practical counsel, "Have this mind in you, which was also in Christ Jesus." Even in this one cardinal text relied on by dogmatic authoritarians, the death of our Lord is set forward by Himself as an example to His followers rather than as a substitutionary sacrifice for sin, in which they can have no share, and which cannot be imitated in their own lives.

One saying out of all the wealth of the four Gospels! And that saying far from clear in its teaching of a substitutionary theory of the atoning death; appearing to some of us rather to present that death as an example, a manifestation for our emulation of the spirit

of sacrifice for others which saves and purifies and works redemption. Again we say, a slender peg on which to hang so weighty and precise a doctrine.

I cannot refrain from emphasizing once more the fact that in the fourth Gospel, latest and most theological of New Testament books, there is no hint or trace of the substitutionary theory of the atonement, or of what older theology used to call "the scheme of redemption," in which the death of Christ in the sinner's stead had central place. What tremendous decisiveness dwells in the fact that the Prologue to that Gospel, written long after the Lord's death and resurrection, giving the most majestic forthsetting in the whole New Testament of the glory of the divine Christ and Lord, leading up to the great declaration that through His coming into human history light and salvation and sonship came to man—that in all this there is no hint that the death of Christ in our stead is a cardinal fact in Christian doctrine. Here is a "*Cur Deus Homo?*" beside which Anselm's has no authority at all; and that which Anselm decides to be the essential element in the answer does not even emerge in John's discussion of the meaning of Christ's incarnation. That is a fact worthy of serious attention.

In the fourth Gospel, as in the Synoptists—perhaps even more than in them—much is made of the death of Christ. Our salvation is shown to be intimately connected with that death. But always that death is held aloft as the supreme manifestation of the habitual spirit of Christ, as the necessary climax of His life and work, or as the power that shall attract men, and unify all the "children of God," as the fullest revelation of the love

of God that will not be denied, the grace of God that knows no limit, or as the supreme and perfect example for men to adore and follow. It would be a joy and a satisfaction to go through the Gospels and show how clear is this fact. I must leave each of my readers to do that for himself. I can only point out certain great and decisive discoveries that emerge as we honestly seek to learn the teaching of the Gospels.

Always, when the Master uses the word "save," or "salvation," he means fullness of life. He does not always discriminate between spiritual and physical life. Indeed in many cases He uses the word to denote the new and radiant health of body that came to sick men and women through contact with Him. "Thy faith hath *saved* thee" was said most frequently, if not exclusively, to those recipients of an added fullness of life who were thereby freed of bodily or mental ills. And always the means of that salvation is contact with the personality of Christ Himself. It is so clear in the Gospels that one wonders how anyone can fail to see it, that to Christ Himself "salvation" did not mean acquittal in a court-room, forensic justification, or release from guilt or penalty through the intervention of a substitute. Salvation plainly meant to Him fresh access of vital force, a new vigor, zest, and joy of living, and to Him the means of salvation was always personal contact with His own radiant, life-giving personality. Always He was busy, turning men's thoughts and hearts to the God who was like Him, revealed in Him, known and made known by Him. He is the "bread" by which men live, the "grace that comes down from heaven and gives life." Always it is this impartation of added

fullness to life that stands out as the chief meaning of salvation in the narratives of the first three Gospels, the doctrines of the fourth, and in the whole life and teaching of Jesus "as He is offered to us in the Gospel." Beginning at the Sermon on the Mount and on through all that Jesus did and taught while in bodily presence on earth, He clearly shows that to His view the "saved" man, the happy, blessed, God-approved child of the Father and of the Father's home, is the one who has found, and finds every day in growing measure, a true spiritual experience, a spirit characterized by humility, sincerity, unselfishness, aspiration after righteousness, kindness, inward purity, love of peace and steadfast loyalty, the one who dares stand for God and truth, who enters into the joy and glory of self-devotion, whose righteousness exceeds that of the Pharisee because it is inward and loving, whose ideal is to be perfect as God is perfect, who yet knows that the beginning of that perfection is for a man to turn and become as a little child. Poor in spirit and yet dauntless; seeking first the Kingdom of God; finding the whole Bible condensed in the Golden Rule, and the two great commandments; loving, keeping, doing the will of the Master, and walking in His way and truth; eager to be kind and ready to forgive—so does the Gospel picture the "saved" man. One who goes with open mind to the Synoptic Gospels, rises from their study forced to the irresistible conclusion that to Christ the "saved" man was the Christlike, the one who had "entered into life" and found the secret of joy, vigor, and peace in a spirit and life like that of his Savior, yes, like that of God Himself. This life of love and faith,

of fearlessness and joy, of daily fellowship with God—wholesomely ethical as well as wholesomely mystical—this is salvation as Jesus saw it. Its very center and essence is personal fellowship with God, and with Christ who reveals Him. Salvation came to Zacchæus when Christ entered his life as well as his home. Mary chose the good part when she chose to sit at the feet of Jesus in humble, loving fellowship. And all may find "rest" and "life" by coming to Him, just coming, without the surmounting of theological fences, or the accepting of doctrinal or other requirements. "Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out."

Every time Christ speaks of hell, or of eternal danger and loss, the connection shows the fatal lack to be, not one of doctrinal soundness, nor of isolation from "the true Church," but the lack of this living and loving grace. In one instance He draws a picture of the judgment which is more impressive and convincing than Michelangelo's painting, or Spohr's oratorio, or all that the creeds and theologies have said about the Last Judgment; and the test, the only test, on which the issues of eternity are made to hang, is simple love, shown in kindness and service, unconscious love, the revelation of a right heart. He tells of one man in hell; and all we are told of him is that he failed to be kind, to show the spirit of Christ. Indeed the word of Paul might be the motto of the story of Dives, "If any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of His."

Such is salvation according to the Jesus of the Gospels. Bearing this in mind, and remembering also that while our Lord spoke of "salvation" some dozen times only, he spoke more than one hundred times of the

"Kingdom of God," *i.e.*, of redemption as a great common enterprise for the world, in which we are to share with Him, we can confidently and gladly claim that liberal Christianity in its view of what salvation is comes very near to the spirit and view of the Master Himself.

What of the *means* whereby salvation is obtained, the "way" by which one enters into life? Is there discoverable in all the four Gospels, any statement that no one is saved, nor can anyone enter into the new and eternal life, except through some process or scheme, the outworking of a supernatural drama? Are we anywhere told that the way to salvation is through believing in the death of Christ as a satisfaction for sin and a substitute for the penalty the sinner had to pay, or that one can become right with God only through the imputation to him of Christ's righteousness? I am not now attempting to pass upon the question of the truth of these doctrines, though, it must be admitted, the question of their vital importance is clearly involved here. I am raising, however, a simple question of fact: Does our Lord, in the Gospels, clearly teach the "way" of salvation held to be essential by authoritarians? The plain answer is that He does not. He does not even hint at it.

On the other hand, His teaching is simple, clear, decisive, as to the "way" of salvation. It is through *coming to God,* and especially through coming to God as revealed in Christ. It is through obedience, following, doing the will, loving God, having the grace of God in the heart. With no hint of preliminaries, of theological conditions to be met, or of any conditions at all, we are to ask, seek, and knock, until our persistence is rewarded with the establishment of the closer personal contact

with God that brings in its train the added fullness of life called salvation. "Come unto me," "follow me," "believe in God," that is all. Jesus left one prayer for His followers to use. In it He tells us to ask forgiveness of sins simply and directly. Forgiveness is for those who forgive, eternal life is for those who obey, follow, love, and serve. Those are in that personal relationship which *is* salvation, who do the will of God: "for whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother and sister and mother." One inherits eternal life by loving God and one's neighbor; and the Lord even chooses a heretic in doctrine to exemplify the all-inclusive love that gives entrance into eternal life. His richest, deepest teaching of what it means to be saved, that parable of the Lost Son in which the human heart left to itself has always found the heart of the Gospel, shows salvation as coming just through the son's turning again to his Father. That parable decisively condemns the self-righteous idea of salvation by one's own goodness, in the hateful character of the elder son; but it shows the sinner finding salvation, not through any sacrifice, or the outworking of any forensic or substitutionary scheme, but just through penitence and faith on the one hand, and forgiving love on the other. There is an animal slain in that story; but it is to provide, not a sacrifice, but a feast of joy.

Equally clear as in the Synoptists is the position of the fourth Gospel that the "way" of salvation is through the grace of God coming to man, as man comes to God. At the very outset the "Lamb of God" is presented as about to "take away the sin of the world" through His death: yet the death is looked on, as later in the book,

as a necessary preliminary to the "baptism with the spirit." It is the grace of God that brings salvation, giving men a new birth, making them see the Kingdom; God so loved the world that He gave His Son, that men, believing on Him, might have eternal life. It is in this personal relationship with God through Christ that salvation is found. As clearly and emphatically as in the Synoptists is salvation, in the fourth Gospel, made dependent on obedience—a view emphasized in the first Epistle of John also. The grace of God in Christ is the channel through which the living water comes. It is he who "hears" and "believes," hears Christ's word, and believes on the God who sent Him, who is saved—a statement practically identical with the uncompromising, simple test, "not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven." Not even the sacred Scriptures have life in themselves: they only point to Christ, in whose personal fellowship is life. As Jesus lived through communion with God, even so we may live the same life eternal through communion with God in Him. The all-important matter is being "willing to do His will." Abiding in Him, and in His word, is the condition of life and salvation. We trust Him, as the sheep trust the shepherd, and He gives eternal life. In that beautiful figure of the sheepfold, in which the shepherd "lays down his life for the sheep," it is made clear that his death is one with His life, in proof of His extreme, unreserved love and care for them. *He,* not facts or doctrines about Him, is "the resurrection and the life."

The cross is indeed presented sublimely, impressively,

in the fourth Gospel. Certain Greeks visit Him, and to Jesus their approach is an earnest of how the whole earth is expectantly ready for the true God and eternal life to be made known. He Whom God sent must die to spread that Gospel through the world. But note carefully two clear facts about His death as it presents itself to Jesus. The first is that He views it as a striking instance of a cosmic principle of sacrifice, of life through death, a principle of God's ceaseless working in all ages; one with the growing of wheat, and with all dying that issues in life. The other is that the effect which He foresees and foretells will follow from His being "lifted up" is that it will "draw men to Him," making them more vividly aware of *Him*. The value and power of His death is clearly set forth as residing in the making of Him, His personality, His saving fellowship, more impressive and appealing. That is Jesus' own view of the meaning and value of His death, as set forth by John.

The long discourse found in the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth chapters of John is given as the final word of our Master to "His own." Surely, here we would expect to find the fundamentals of His gospel. We find the words full of life, of grace, of joy, of communion with Christ, and with God through Him, but not a hint in them of any "scheme of salvation" as necessary, or of any substitutionary meaning in His death. The one outright reference in them to His death represents that death as one in spirit with all sacrificial dying for one's friends, as a supreme proof of love. "The way, truth, and life" are there set forth not in creeds or forms, but in Christ Himself. Life eternal is defined as "knowing God and Jesus Christ whom God has sent."

Saving knowledge is described as knowing that God sent Jesus, and that Jesus knew God, and in abiding in the "name" of God and the love of God.

Different as the Christ of the fourth Gospel may seem to some from the Christ of the Synoptists, He is one and the same in His forthsetting of what salvation is and how it comes. It is life, "more life and fuller," and it comes by direct gift of God in spiritual communion to those who humbly receive it, repenting of their sins, trusting in God's grace, and obeying His voice and His Son.

One comes from a study of the four Gospels clearly convinced that their teaching about the meaning and way of salvation is one with the true heart of the message of salvation found in liberal Christianity today, far more consonant with it than with the authoritarian position.

But those who speak for the authoritarian rather than for the vital conception of the meaning and way of salvation would here interpose with two statements. The first is that the absence of the doctrine of substitutionary atonement from the Gospels is a natural one, due to the fact that not much would be said about the meaning of the death of Christ until that death had taken place; and that we should not ask that the Christian doctrine of salvation, therefore, be found in reality until we come to deal with those who, through the spirit of God, interpret to us the deep meaning of Calvary as an atonement wherein Christ suffered in the sinner's stead.

There is some justification for this contention. Jesus Himself told His followers that there were important truths which He could not tell them while present with

them, but must leave to the Spirit's guidance to bring to them. No one can safely or wisely or rightly go "back to Christ," in the sense in which that phrase has sometimes been understood, ignoring what Paul and others have said to us under the guidance of the Spirit of Truth.

Yet this contention may be pushed, and has been pushed by some, to extremes that have almost nullified the power and value of Christ's own teaching and point of view, or put it on a plane of lower importance as compared with the teaching of Paul. Refreshing vigor and wholesome truth are combined in this word from one of the Christian leaders of our day: "The statement that Jesus made the forgiveness of sins, which He preached, secretly dependent upon His own future death, is to be placed among the most poverty-stricken of theological foundlings. He announced the full amnesty of the Father without bargaining or haggling: 'Thy sins are forgiven thee.'"[1]

Such is the clear teaching of the four Gospels as to the meaning and way of salvation. Were these our entire New Testament, liberal Christianity might rightly claim not only to be entitled to the name of "Christian," but to be considered peculiarly faithful to the original meaning of that saving revelation of God and of His grace which came to men in and through our Lord Jesus Christ.

But, as we have said, those who hold strongly to the Catholic, or authoritarian, conception of salvation urge that the gospels are not the only trustworthy records

[1] Deissmann, *The Religion of Jesus and the Faith of Paul*, p. 89.

of early Christianity; that we have also, as authoritative, the letters of Paul, the Epistle to the Hebrews, and the other documents that make up the New Testament; and that the points of view found in these are at least as important and as decisive as those found in the Gospels. Indeed, some extremists have gone so far as to claim for Paul and his views an authority which takes precedence over that of the words of Christ Himself. Christ came into the world in order to die, they say; and therefore no complete and authoritative view of His mission and work was possible until His death had taken place. Its meaning could only then be unfolded.

To this extreme view there is a decisive answer. No one who knows truly at all the mind of Paul can doubt with what horror and vehemence this ideal would have been opposed by him, that he, the "bond-servant of Jesus Christ," should be regarded as superior in authority to his Master. No! If there is conflict of authority, if the issue comes to a head, and one has to be taken and the other rejected, let the Master's principle be followed, "a servant is not greater than his Lord." Sound Christian sense will always hold with Matthew Arnold, that "Jesus is above the heads of His interpreters," even of the greatest of them all.

Yet no one can question, nor should anyone wish to, the fact that Paul presents Christ and Christianity in a new way which adds much to its presentation in the Gospel. That Spirit of truth, promised by the Lord to His disciples, rested in wonderful measure on the great apostle. He revealed added depths of meaning in the Christian facts which others had not seen.

Unquestionably he does represent salvation as de-

pending on the death of Christ, a death which was (though I am sure Paul would say "is") a propitiation. We are redeemed by, or in, His blood. He nailed our sins to His cross. We are justified, acquitted, on the ground of His perfect atoning sacrifice. There is very much in Paul's epistles to sustain the view of salvation taken by the extreme dogmatic authoritarian, and there is much also to give color to the claims of the sacramentarian and institutional authoritarian. Augustine, who so powerfully furthered the development of both these tendencies, drew inspiration thereto from Paul, especially from the epistle to the Romans. To Paul, man is above all a sinner to be saved. And salvation seems to him a far more intricate and difficult process than it is represented to be in the words of Jesus. Paul was not of the opinion that the sinner could just "come to God" and be forgiven; at least some sinners could not. He had found it no such simple process; and he was one of those intense souls to whom their personal experiences are forever normative and decisive. There must be a change of nature so radical that only mighty forces could avail to bring it about. And the cross loomed up in Paul's field of vision as the very central fact and enabling force in that redemption. By nature one was "in sin"; he must become "in Christ." That change could be made only through the atoning sacrifice of Christ on the cross, which thereby proved itself the solution of the religious quest of the heart of man through the ages.

One cannot, inside the present limits of discussion, deal adequately with the tremendous question of Paul's con-

ception of redemption and of the essential meaning of Christianity. I must refer you to the books devoted to that question. In addition to older and better known treatises, I have found Peabody's *The Apostle Paul and the Modern World,* and Deissmann's *The Religion of Jesus and the Faith of Paul* helpful and illuminating. The last-named, though brief and general in character, is especially rich in suggestion and in deep spiritual insight.

It will not be amiss, however, to call your attention to certain facts with regard to Paul and his thinking which serve to correct the assumption so widely obtaining and so long persisting that, to Paul, Christianity meant only a scheme of redemption wrought through faith in the fact of Christ's suffering on Calvary in the sinner's stead. Based on Paul's writings as this view is, and forming, as it does, an important part of his theology, it is by no means the whole, nor even the heart, of his "gospel."

Any inquiry into Paul's view of Christian truth needs to keep constantly in mind these considerations:

1. We must be sure to note and take into account how wide is the latitude and variety of imagery employed by Paul to set forth the meaning of the cross of Christ, and of the Christian life. It is impossible to understand Paul truly until one appreciates the fact that he was essentially and most of all a poetic soul. He saw in images. The widely accepted view that he was beyond all else a theologian is quite inaccurate. His most theological passages are quick with the vivid images and word-uses of a poet. He is a theo-

logian in the same sense that Robert Browning is a philosopher.

It is obviously doing less than justice to such a soul to seize on some one of these many images, or forms, of his thought, even though it be the most dramatic, the most striking, the one most frequently used, and count that the sum and substance of his message. When Paul spoke of "my gospel" he meant something far richer and more varied than the scheme of soteriology which some represent as the whole of distinctive Christianity.

Paul was a Hebrew, with a considerable amount of intellectual and practical contact with the Roman world of affairs and the Hellenic world of ideas. He drew freely from all these sources. Rabbinic argument by allegory presses close in his thinking upon Platonic idealism, and is followed by, or fused with, Roman ideas of law and justice. He ransacked the world of his time for illustration and illumination wherewith to set Christ before the mind of his age. One feels sure, as he reads Paul, that if that great soul were here today he would be taking toll, with consuming eagerness and joy, of the wealth of knowledge and imagery that modern science has discovered, bringing it all into captivity to the obedience of Christ.

Those who see Christian redemption adequately set forth in terms of acquittal in a court room, or in terms of cancellation of a debt, or in any other single aspect, need to remind themselves of the breadth and sweep of Paul's imagery of salvation. Perhaps, this cannot better be made clear than by quoting Professor Deissmann, to whom my debt is great. He says that when we study

Paul's religious confessions to the best advantage, they become:

"Many rays streaming in all directions from the one point of light given in the experience of communion with Christ.

There are many other synonyms besides, but the following are the most important: justification, reconciliation, forgiveness, redemption and adoption.

In all these figurative expressions man stands before God, each time in a different guise before the same God, first as an accused person, secondly as an enemy, thirdly as a debtor, fourthly and fifthly as a slave. In all these cases man is in an abnormal and bad position. Then, in Christ, he comes into the normal and good position.

We shall not comprehend Paul until we have heard all these various testimonies concerning salvation in Christ sounding together in harmony like the notes of a single full choral.

The Pauline illustrations will be more satisfactorily adapted to our own times the less we petrify them into dogmatic statements, and the more we see them as expressions of living religion."

These are wise and true words, to which all must give heed who wish to find out for themselves the real teaching and gospel of Paul.

2. A second consideration we must keep in mind in regard to Paul's thinking is that to him the death of Christ is never thought of alone or in itself. Always it is associated inseparably with the resurrection and the living power of Christ; and more often than it is

viewed as, above all, the necessary preliminary to His resurrection, something through which He had to pass at the hands of men in order to attain to the divine power whereby He saves men.

It is scarcely too much to say that to the mind of Paul the resurrection rather than the death was the more vital, as doctrine or fact. Abundant evidence can be found to support this assertion. In his first sermon given in the Acts, the entire stress, in proving His Messiahship, is laid on the resurrection of Jesus, and His death is viewed as having been brought about by those evil leaders who wished, but were unable, to thwart God's saving purpose. It is the resurrection that is chiefly significant. Why? Because by it the world regained a Christ who is *living*, and can now save by His living and present grace of fellowship. The sermon at Athens says not a word of the cross, but leads up to the resurrection as its climax. The one thing which the practical, non-religious Roman governor, Festus, caught from Paul's speech was that Paul said that someone was alive whom the Jews said was dead—an interesting confirmation of the view that it was the resurrection on which Paul constantly laid stress. In this, his preaching is at one with that of Peter, of Stephen, and of all the primitive Church leaders. Had we only the Book of the Acts to rely on, we would be inclined to say that the death of Christ was only a necessary and terrible incident, due to the stupidity and hatefulness of certain men, but that that shameful death had been swallowed up in the glory of the resurrection.

Even when Paul is most captivated by, and brooding most deeply on, the meaning of the cross, most

thoroughly "lost in wonder, love, and praise" at the mysteries of redemption in the blood of Christ—the light of the open tomb, or rather the light of the heavenly glory of the Risen and Living Lord, plays all around his thought. It will do anyone good to trace through the great epistle to the Romans this close connection of the life with the death: "Who was delivered for our trespasses, and was raised for our justification." "If, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, shall we be saved by his life."

Wherever Paul seems to be making a concise and inclusive statement of the essential Christian beliefs, there we always find the resurrection in possession of the supreme place, the cross even being omitted at times. In the great summary which he says includes "the gospel which I preached, which ye received, wherein ye stand, by which ye are saved," after mention of the belief that "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,"[2] he goes on to enlarge upon and to emphasize the resurrection, and the power and grace that come from the living Lord, giving much more space and attaching much greater importance to the resurrection than he gives to the death. In the beautiful hymn incorporated in I Timothy, setting forth the elements of "the mystery of godliness," we find mention of the incarnation of Christ, His spiritual glory and approvedness, His evident communion with the unseen world, His central place in Christian preaching, and as the object of saving faith, His being "received up into glory," but no word about His death. In the passage in which Paul comes nearer

[2] I Cor. xv. 17ff.

than anywhere else to a definite statement of the beliefs necessary to salvation, he declares that this is "the word of faith which we preach: that if thou shalt confess with thy mouth Jesus as Lord, and shalt believe in thy heart that God raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved."[3] Much as the cross undoubtedly meant to Paul, if it was so truly the one vital matter to him which dogmatic authoritarians declare it to have been, could he by any possibility have overlooked it in this confession of the faith accounted by him as essential to salvation? Is not this omission plain proof that the resurrection, even more than the cross, held the central place in Paul's thinking and in his Gospel? These are but a few striking instances. Anyone can add an indefinite number of others by reading Paul's epistles with an eye to this emphasis of his on the resurrection. It is but the simple truth to say, in the words of a student and lover of Paul, "the death on the cross and the resurrection of Christ cannot in Paul be isolated as two distinct facts; as contemplated by him they are inseparably connected."[4]

3. A third consideration we should always bear in mind, in attempting to understand the thought of Paul, is that his thinking and his theology always were strongly colored by his own spiritual experience.

He came to Christ out of "the law," through a harrowing experience of struggle that shook his soul to the depths. Why should we assume that all men and women and children must come to God in the same way, and construe their salvation in the same terms? Thank God

[3] Rom. x. 9.
[4] Deissmann, p. 237.

that in Paul we have so wonderful a revelation, fresh for all time, of how a sinner can be drawn out of deep despair and a crushing sense of guilt, break utterly with his past, and find peace and life in Christ! In every age there will be many who will come to God in that way, who indeed can come in no other way. In truth, there will be few, if any, who will not enter somewhat into that experience of crisis and transformation. But thank God also for the story of the Prodigal, and the other blessed words that prompt us to say, "I will arise and go" to the forgiving and loving heart of God. Thank God especially for the perfect example in Jesus of a way to live with God without any such exile period of storm and stress. Why not give up insisting that there is but one way, when the Master Himself has opened many of them? Why forget His own blessed word about the way of becoming as a little child, or about the way of the new birth? Every one of us now knows that he was born, but who of us was conscious of it at the time? It is blessed indeed to come to God as naturally as a child turns to a loving mother, or even as unconsciously as a little babe slips into the family circle.

4. A fourth consideration is worthy of our attention in attempting to understand the thought of Paul, even though it be in fact nothing more than a fresh point of view, or a new intensity of emphasis, with regard to one of those already mentioned. We shall quite miss the true meaning in Paul's words if we do not continually bear in mind that to him religion was always a present, personal, vital experience. There are many indubitable proofs of this. When he tells of the vision that arrested him on his way to Damascus he says, not that Christ

was there revealed to him in the heavens; still less that what was there revealed to him was the meaning of what Christ had been and done in the past; "It pleased God to reveal His Son *in me.*" That phrase might justly be taken as the keynote of Paul's religion and theology. Always it was "Christ in me," "Christ in you," "to me to live is Christ," "that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith." Paul writes, it is true, that he determined "to know nothing save Jesus Christ and Him crucified," when he preached in Corinth, but he is careful, in speaking of "the crucified" to use, not the aorist tense, which would have pointed back to a historical event, past and over, but the perfect tense, which prolongs and makes the action or the suffering continuous down to the present moment. To put it graphically, Paul does not speak of Christ as one whose crucifixion is over, but as one whose crucifixion is still going on. Just once in his letters does he use the aorist, saying, "He *was* crucified," and there he adds, "in weakness," which makes it clear that what he counts to be of saving power about the death of Christ is not the event itself, but the present, vital, spiritual meaning of that death. Always, I repeat, his religion is to Paul present, vital, spiritual.

The truth is, the Church and its theological leaders have been all too ready to take as central what to Paul was part of the whole circle of truth; and to take as literal what he meant to be taken as gorgeous, illuminating pictures. Paul had a particular problem as a statesman-missionary to meet, and he met it magnificently. He was faced with the problem of the cross. How could the Messiah who was to come in glory and for victory ever have been put to death? The problem was in-

tensified for Paul by the fact that loyal Hebrews looked for a Messiah to free them from the yoke of Rome: and he had a Messiah to present to them stigmatized with the shameful marks of Roman cruelty and tyranny. Had Rome conquered? How *could* this tragedy of the cross be explained?

There is plain proof in the opening sections of the Acts, that the primitive leaders of the Church found and used a hasty and inadequate solution: The Messiah had come to establish the Kingdom, but His people were not "willing in the day of His power." The leaders, Jewish and Roman, put Him out of the way. Even so, men must not think that the cross on which He was put to death would sink out of sight or be forgotten. It would have a tremendous effect, as time went on, in convincing men of sin—for what sin could be so heinous as that of killing God's own Anointed, and thwarting His mission? That defeat of the cross would prove to be temporary. Through the moral and spiritual effect wrought by the life and death of Jesus, the Messiah, upon the people of God, they would become changed, and prepared to receive Him. Then the Christ would come back to do the work He could not do for the hardness of men's hearts in His first visit from the heavens.

That is the explanation which meets us in the discourses of Peter, recorded in the opening chapters of the Acts. And Paul's sermons, as reported in that book, reflect the same point of view. His earliest epistles also make much of the apocalyptic expectation of Christ's return. A verse in the epistle to the Hebrews[5] states this primitive conception of the meaning of Christ's

[5] Hebrews ix. 28.

death with unmistakable clearness: "Christ also having been once offered to bear the sins of many, shall appear a second time, apart from sin, to them that wait for Him, unto salvation."

But He did not return. The years went on. Christians began to see what Jesus saw so clearly, and taught so cogently, that Christianity is in the world to save the world, not as a mere *interim* ethic or religion. The old problem pressed anew for solution: How could the cross, the shameful death of the Anointed One, be harmonized with the great doctrine of salvation through new fullness of life? The resurrection had been instantly preached; its connection with the great basic truth of new fullness of life by the grace of God was so clear and close that no one could mistake it. But why the death? What could be done to make this tragedy, a stumbling-block to Jews and foolishness to Greeks, congruous with the Christian message of life and joy.

Paul saw the great truth of how this could be done. Two mighty currents of thought and feeling, streaming down from the past, offered their analogies to him and powerfully suggested the way out. One of them was the elaborate and majestic system of sacrifice, developed through the history of the Hebrew people, and enormously emphasized and enlarged by later Judaism. Within this system of outward offerings had arisen in a few lofty prophetic souls an inspired vision of the inner meaning of service and sacrifice, a vision gloriously set forth in the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah,[6] a passage which seems to have been vividly before the mind of

[6] Cf. Luke xxii, 37.

Jesus Himself and to have been instantly appropriated by the followers of Christ as especially applicable to Him, and strikingly fulfilled in Him. Their earliest name for their Master, after his death, indeed was "the Servant." All this was before the mind of Paul. But, knowing as he did also the world of his time outside of Palestine, he felt the force of the appeal that the "mystery-religions," which made much of the symbolism of life through death and of the approach to God through blood and by means of mystic rites, were making to the Hellenic world. These two powerful influences worked upon the mind of that age, and especially upon the sensitive soul of Paul. He pointed out to Jew and Greek that the death of Christ was the fulfillment of that which they both had been seeking, the Jew with his sacrifices, the Greek with his mysteries. And, with his brilliant, impassioned, imaginative power, he set forth, under all possible figures, this justification and glorification of the death of God's Chosen, the one sacrifice for sin, the one supreme example of the great truth that new fullness of life, the perfect ransom of enslaved souls, comes through death. It was a glorious truth, presented with matchless power and with vivid insight. It is the supreme instance of his missionary method of "being all things to all men, that he might by all means save some." To the Jew he became a Jew, to the Greek a Greek; to both he made known the deep meaning of the crucifixion in a way that harmonized with their differing inheritance. In thus meeting the problem and satisfying the thought and feeling of his own day, He gave a lasting setting to eternal truth. But we must not mistake the rich and varied colors and forms of the

setting for the deep, eternal truth. We may be sure that the apostle who so eagerly appealed to the mind of his own day would be the first eagerly to champion the right of Christ's servants today to present the eternal salvation of Christ in terms that appeal to present ways of thinking and feeling. Is it not plain also that this determined opponent of legalism would vehemently protest against having his gospel presented today as if its legalistic and governmental setting were the very essence of it?

It must be clear to all who study the mind of Paul at first hand, with sympathy and true insight, that to him, all the way through, the essence of the Gospel, the very heart of Christianity, was not any legal process or commercial transaction, but communion with God, fellowship with the Spirit, sharing in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. The cross is the means to this end; but the end is always more than the means. Being a Christian meant to Paul living with God. "The law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and of death." "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature." "Christ in you is the hope of glory." "Christ liveth in me." This is the note resonant in every epistle, in every sentence; this is the essence of Christianity as Paul perceives and knows it. To him, as to his Master, eternal life meant to know God, to live with God in the joy of obedience and love, through the grace of God revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.

At heart, down in the deeps of Christian experience, Paul is wholly at one with his Master and ours. The liberal Christian has this immense advantage over his ultra-conservative brother, that he finds no real dif-

ference between the message in the Gospels and the message in the Epistles. The seeming differences are all on the surface, in the setting and presentation. But the real, deep meaning of the Christian Gospel is the same all through the New Testament, the same down through the ages, the same among all races—life, eternal life, from God, through Christ His Son, our Lord.

Paul came to God through Christ in his own way. Vehement, passionate, temperamental, poetic to a high degree, it was natural that his religious experience should have been marked by violent clashes and revulsions. He came, as so many must come if they are to be saved, to the place where he "burned what once he had adored, and adored what once he had burned." In sharp contrast to Paul, Jesus Himself found God by another way, the way of serene, childlike appropriation. Two children in the same household may live with their loving father or mother, the one violently, passionately, rebelling and then repenting, the other in calm, serene, unbroken comradeship. Who shall say that either is wrong? If one comes to the Father, is received, and lives gladly with Him, that is enough. Thank God for the many ways that lead to Him. However one comes, through storm and stress, or as the natural outgrowth of normal experience, it is the fellowship, the life, that counts.

To Paul as to Jesus, the Christian is a new creature whose faith works in love, because God dwells with him and in him. So intensely does Paul feel this to be the very center and essence of the Christian experience, that even the facts of the life of Jesus, through which he has come to know God, are seen by him as active and present

rather than past. Christ "is," and not "was," crucified. We know Him after the flesh no more; we know Him as a dear and vital presence. The cross is *here,* and by it I am crucified to the world, and the world to me.

The core of Paul's faith is found above all in the constantly recurring phrase "in Christ," which is found in His writings some one hundred and sixty times. This is, in truth, as has been said, "really the characteristic expression of his Christianity." Here is the heart of his body of doctrine; nothing else is so vital, so necessary, so central.

All through the New Testament *this* is Christianity, this is salvation, this redemption: to know God in personal fellowship, through faith in Jesus Christ through whose life, teaching, death, and resurrection, or rather, let us say, through the *personality* that comes to full expression in these experiences, the grace of God comes afresh every age, every day, every moment, bringing fullness and freeness of life. And the most essential thing about Jesus Christ, that through which He is "the wisdom of God and the power of God," is not that He did thus and so in the past, but that He does "in me" what I need now. In that Paul, Peter, John, all agree: and in that they are all one with the mind of Jesus Himself.

And that is the faith of liberal Christianity. It finds life, salvation, in a vital experience of fellowship with God, through Jesus Christ. The cross of Christ speaks of love unbounded, sacrifice unstinted, pardon unlimited. To the legally minded it means acquittal; to the commercially minded it means cancellation of a debt; to the soul enslaved to the world, oppressed by the tyranny of

things, it means ransom, enlargement, liberty. Under all these forms, in and through them all, it means grace, love, unlimited personal interest of God in us men and our salvation. And no one has any right to attempt to bind that grace to one form of expression, or to set bars before all ways but the way that appeals to him. The One in whom we trust is, as He was so clearly seen to be by the great apostle, not dead, but living: "crucified through weakness, but alive through the power of God." It may not be without significance that the Romanist has a crucifix, the Protestant an empty cross. The Christ of the authoritarian is forever hanging at the point of death. The Christ of the liberal has left death behind, for the fullness and glory of His risen life. And that is the Christ of the New Testament. We do not go back for Him: we go on with Him.

Liberal Christianity believes that it rests on the New Testament, on the real teaching of the Lord Jesus, of Paul, and of the other early leaders of the church. To its critics, and to all who misunderstand or mistrust it, it says this quiet but determined word:

Go to the sources; take the New Testament, uncolored by particular theological preconceptions; take it as it is, in the light of the best and most reverent scholarship; and if it can be shown that liberal Christianity, in its main positions and views, is inconsistent with the teaching of the New Testament, as a whole, we shall humbly confess our error, and seek the way shown us by our Lord and His followers in whom His Spirit dwelt. But, until we are so convinced of error, not from the creeds, not by argument or threat, but from the plain, clear statements of the New Testament itself, we, believing

ourselves to be at heart one with our Lord and with His first interpreters, must obey God rather than men, and stand joyfully by that way of thinking of God and living with God which seems to us so clearly in harmony with the spirit and meaning of the main currents of thought and feeling in the authoritative sources of our faith.

CHAPTER V

LIBERAL CHRISTIANITY THE RELIGIOUS HOPE OF THE WORLD

If what has thus far been said of liberal Christianity is true—indeed if even a part of it is true—then its right to be considered a true phase of Christianity and to live its life and do its work in the world and in the Christian Church freely cannot be questioned. It is an honorable and valuable part of the normal development of the Christian religion.

But those who hold to the positions of liberal Christianity with conviction and assurance, claim far more for this modern movement than that it has a right to exist and to work unmolested amid other forms and phases of Christianity. They are very sure in their hearts, and do not hesitate to proclaim it openly and positively, that liberal Christianity is indispensable to religious progress and influence today, indeed that it has a supreme function to perform. It is, they believe, in very large measure, and in a sense that can be predicated of no other movement, the religious hope of the world of our day.

It is the presence and strength of this conviction that makes them tenacious in their faith, and bold in its proclamation. They are attacked and subjected to a cross-fire from those whom we have called the authoritarians and those others whom we have called the humanitarians.

They are asked why they continue to disturb the peace of the Church, why they cannot let it rest satisfied with accepted doctrines and customs. Or, if they really mean to hold fast to the new beliefs, and feel compelled to take the new ways, why do they not frankly say so, leave the old Church, and, as it is often put, "go to the Unitarians with whom they belong." Liberals are sometimes tempted to make the retort which is obvious, and would be at least as fair as the charge against themselves, that the fundamentalists ought to leave the evangelical Protestant churches which they are keeping stirred up with their appeals to strife, and go to the Roman Church, where they belong. But in fact the liberal Christian knows that he is not a Unitarian, and that his fundamentalist brother is not a Romanist, whatever each may say of the other in heated moments.

Liberals are at heart evangelical, and that which at bottom they hold in common with other true evangelicals is far more significant than that which divides them. The liberal Christian believes with all his heart that "God was in Christ" in a sense that never has been and never can be true of anyone or anything else; he is sure that God is still "in Christ" for man's salvation. He trusts for salvation not in good works, but in the good grace of God. His final appeal is to the Word of God, not to traditions of the Fathers, nor to decisions of the Church; and to the Christian conscience rather than to courts or councils. In short, he is a Protestant. He believes that all that makes him a liberal Christian makes him more truly a Protestant. The spirit and meaning and historic positions of evangelicalism are inexpressibly dear to him. And he is very sure that,

while he looks at some things as his fathers did not look at them, and says some things differently, he is nevertheless heartily at one with the past supporters of true evangelical Christianity in all the essentials of their spirit and thinking.

It would be a pleasure to enter here into a comparative study of evangelicalism and liberal Christianity. For at heart they are one. Fundamentalism spends its time caring for the outgrown shell; the living substance of evangelical faith and experience is in that vital fellowship with God in Christ which we have seen to be the very heart of liberal Christianity. We can only stop in passing to cite a single example—that central doctrine of salvation to which we gave attention in the last chapter. Here the liberal Christian is heartily one with the evangelical Christian. For it would be hard to find a statement of what salvation involves and of the way of its coming that would be more satisfactory to the liberal Christian than that found in the definitions of "faith" and "repentance" in the Westminster Shorter Catechism. They are represented there as essentials to salvation, as that which God requires of us "that we may escape the wrath and curse due to us for sin." What stronger statement could there be of their essential, vital character? "Faith in Jesus Christ" is defined as "a saving grace, whereby we receive and rest upon Him alone for salvation, as He is offered to us in the Gospel." A better statement of what the liberal Christian means by the faith that saves could not be framed. He "receives and rests upon," not assertions about Jesus Christ, or doctrines concerning Jesus Christ, but Jesus Christ Himself, as offered to us, not in the

creeds, but "in the Gospel." That describes saving faith as the liberal Christian sees it. And always coupled with it in the outworkings of salvation is the spiritual and moral experience of "repentance unto life," blended of "a true sense of sin," "apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ," "grief and hatred of sin," "turning unto God," and "full purpose of and endeavor after new obedience." The liberal Christian does not ask a better definition than that thus given in those simple straight terms of his conception of the way by which man finds salvation and life through Christ in God.

It is, of course, always precarious to attempt to say what the great men of past times would be and do were they living today. But the liberal Christian cannot read the sayings of Luther and Calvin, or study the writings of the Westminister divines, without a strong conviction forming in his mind that, were these men living and working in the Church today, they would be found leading the advance guard of theological thinking and experience as they led it in their own time. He feels that their spirit is one with his own. If we do see further, to them should go the credit, because we stand on their shoulders. The liberal Christian is very sure that the spirit and point of view of the leaders of the past is well expressed in the words with which John Robinson said farewell to the little company of Pilgrims when they were about to leave Holland:

> We are now ere long to part asunder, and the Lord knoweth whether I shall live to see your faces again. But whether the Lord hath appointed it or not, I

charge you before God and His blessed angels, to follow me no further than I have followed Christ; and if God should reveal anything to you by any other instrument of His, to be as ready to receive it as ever you were to receive the truth by my ministry; for I am very confident the Lord hath more truth and light yet to break forth out of His holy Word. I bewail the condition of the Reformed churches, who are come to a period in religion and will go no further than the instruments of their reformation. The Lutherans cannot be drawn to go beyond what Luther saw; for whatever part of God's will has been imparted and revealed to Calvin, they will rather die than embrace it. And the Calvinists, as you see, stick where Calvin left them. This is a misery much to be lamented; for though Luther and Calvin were precious shining lights in their times, yet God did not reveal His whole will to them; and were they living now they would be as ready and willing to embrace further light as that which they had received. I beseech you to remember your church covenant, at least that part of it whereby you promise and covenant with God and with one another to receive whatsoever light or truth shall be made known to you from the written Word of God.

The liberal Christian is confident that deeper study of the Word of God, and a better knowledge of the spirit of Protestantism, would lead all the Protestant Churches to make room gladly and unreservedly for liberal Christians in their ranks.

Much of that for which liberal Christians stand seems to them to be clearly of the very essence and spirit of

the Christian religion. They are contending for the heart of the New Testament. They can no more keep still about it than could Peter and John when ordered by the Council not to preach again or speak in the name of the Lord Jesus.

Is this a mistaken estimate? Is it an overbold, or fantastic claim, thus to hold that liberal Christianity is the religious hope of the world?

Certainly we are living today in a world that needs saving. It is in desperate need of any and every agency that shows promise of being able to pull it out of the pit and set it on its feet and on the right path. A dozen years ago it was not hard to maintain a blithe and cheerful optimism, an easy belief that all would go well just through the outworking of nature. There was much confident talk about man's mastery over nature, and an easy confidence in Progress, as a sort of beneficent good fairy who would waft us into the Kingdom of God if only we would lie back and let her do the work. No one but a fool can believe such things now. We were fools and blind to believe them then; but it is criminal folly to think in that way now. We have had our eyes opened to the fact that material progress carries with it not the slightest guarantee of real advance; that not only the inventions and discoveries in the material realm, but the intellect itself, and all that we boastfully call "enlightenment," are but a set of morally indifferent instruments that can be used by either the righteous or the wicked for the more effective accomplishment of their respective and opposed ends. Every new fact ascertained, every new law of nature discovered, every advance registered in knowledge and

skill and the power to control natural forces, may only enable devilish men to make a world more cursed and miserable. The God of truth who has opened to us this marvelous wealth of modern knowledge says, as of old, "Behold, I have set before you this day life and death, the blessing and the curse Wherefore choose life." Man stands amid these mighty new forces and facts with the dread alternative confronting him of either subduing them to spiritual uses or letting them smother and strangle him till his spirit dies.

The supreme peril of our present world may be put in a sentence: We are in danger of being wrecked and destroyed by mechanism grown beyond the power of the human spirit to control and direct. I use the word "mechanism" in a large sense, to include social machinery, organization, co-operative actions, as well as the enormous multiplication of instruments whereby natural forces are brought into play and use. Man today is little more than a child left free to play as he will with high-powered, destructive toys; a child excited, eager, but too immature to use them safely and for right ends.

Much of our use of this rapidly growing mass of material instruments and natural forces, where it is not outwardly destructive, is wasteful and enervating to the better nature of man. We are taking the material that might build the New Jerusalem and wasting it on fads and follies. This has come to be matter of common talk, and even a constantly recurring subject of jest in the comic papers. Man finds the amazing secret of broadcasting speech far and wide, only to use it to send out through the ether silly bedtime stories and inane jazz music; he learns how to mount into the air with

wings, and write on the sky with letters a mile high, and has nothing better to write there, for millions to see at once, than the name of a cigarette. The automobile is the most effective ally of the highwayman. If he would not be destroyed by the works of his hands, man must come to learn the truth of Kant's dictum, that in all the world there is nothing really good but good will.

As compared with our fathers, we have at our disposal amazing devices for saving time and strength. But what of the character of the uses to which we put the time and strength we save? The question of what is to be done with our increasing leisure is a crucial question. A thoughtful Chinese was visiting an American whose home was in a suburb of New York. The host looked at his watch, and remarked: "If we hurry we can catch an express." They hastened along, almost at a run; they rushed through the gate at the station; they caught the train just as it started; and, as they sank down in the seat, the American said: "We have saved fifteen minutes by catching this train." "Ah," said the Chinese gentleman, "and what are we going to do with it now we have saved it?" That "Satan finds some mischief still for idle hands to do" may be not only a nursery rhyme, but a terrible truth. Man will never get far, never be safe, he will only sink further and further into the mire of perdition the more he gets and knows and can do, until he learns that it is the soul that gives the right tone to it all, that man does not live by bread alone, or by knowledge alone, but by the grace of the Living God; that, until the soul is right, nothing is right.

Yet science is here to stay; modern knowledge cannot be swept aside by any uprising of faith; and if it could, the world of men would be inestimably the losers by the process. What the world needs most, and must have, is a faith that can master the forces that have been let loose in our modern life; a faith that can keep the spirit of man strong, well-poised, dominant, masterful, amid the riot of new facts and forces that deafen and dazzle the soul. Henry Adams, that strange representative of much that is in the mind and heart of the modern man, put the case forcibly, when he wrote:

"Crossing the hostile seas, our eager band
Saw hills and forests rising in the blue:
Our Father's Kingdom in the Promised Land;
We seized it—and dethroned the Father, too.

And now we are the Father, with our brood,
Ruling the infinite, not Three but One;
We made our world, and saw that it was good;
Ourselves we worship, and we have no Son.

Yet we have Gods, for even our strong nerve
Falters before the energy we own;
Which shall be master? Which of us shall serve?
Which wear the fetters? Which shall bear the crown?

Brave though we be, we dread to face the Sphynx,
Or answer the old riddle she still asks.
Strong as we are, our reckless courage shrinks
To look beyond the piecework of our tasks."

There is such a thing as gaining the whole world and losing the soul in the doing of it; and it exactly describes the peril that threatens modern society. "I came to cast fire on the earth," said Jesus, in words strangely prophetic. The world is on fire, and is blazing furiously,

with a fire compounded of a thirst for freedom, for democracy, for knowledge both of things visible and invisible, for equality; ablaze wherever the emancipating touch of the spirit and mind of Christ has been felt by the soul of man. You cannot take the New Testament and its Christ into any corner of the world and not thereby set these flames going. Men are not plagued with industrialism, with communism, with socialism, with submarines and lethal gases, with impatient and revolutionary outbreaks in heathen lands, as they are where Christ has touched the spirit of man and set it free. This modern world, with its whirling mass of high tension forces, has been set on fire by His spirit.

Yet the fire is by no means all; indeed it is but a small part of that which He came to bring. No sooner had He said "I came to cast fire on the earth," than He went on to exclaim: "but I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished." He came bringing, also, a spirit that could control and master the fire, a faith that could use to the glory of God the mighty forces developed by the intellect of man freely working on the facts of this wonderful world. The trouble with the world is that it has taken the fire without the faith; the free spirit has not become the godly, the sacrificial spirit. Man's soul must be mastered by the faith, or both his world and he will be consumed by the fire.

Whence shall we men derive the spiritual energy sufficient to overcome and master these titanic forces and facts of our modern world? Not from science itself. There is no hope there. The best we get from Christless

science and philosophy is a dogged and unreasonable appeal to the human spirit to live by its best ideals, in spite of the fact that science offers no good foundation for them, and nothing to set our hopes on in the long future. Bertrand Russell tells us what we may expect if we take science as the final word: we may then be very sure that

> "Man is the product of causes which had no prevision of the end they were achieving; that his origin, his growth, his hopes and fears, his loves and his beliefs, are but the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms; that no fire, no heroism, no intensity of thought or feeling, can preserve an individual life beyond the grave; that all the labors of the ages, all the devotion, all the inspiration, all the noonday brightness of human genius, are destined to extinction in the vast depths of the solar system; and that the whole temple of man's achievement must inevitably be burned beneath the debris of a universe in ruins.

And, on the basis of these facts, we have nothing brighter to look forward to than this gloomy picture:

> "The life of man is a long march through the night, surrounded by invisible foes, tortured by weariness and pain, toward a goal that few can hope to reach, and where none may tarry long.
>
> Brief and powerless is man's life; on him and all his race the slow sure doom falls pitiless and dark. Blind to good and evil, reckless of destruction, omnipotent matter rolls on its relentless way; for Man

condemned today to lose his dearest, tomorrow himself to pass through the gate of darkness, it remains only to cherish, ere yet the blow falls, the lofty thoughts that ennoble his little day."

Why cherish these lofty thoughts? It is strange that with his keen mind this writer does not perceive the utter absurdity of clinging to high thoughts and fine ideals in a world that ends in extinction alike for the high and low, and for ideals as well as for persons. It is not strange that he should disregard in his own life the principles of sex morality maintained by mankind at such cost and by such desperate struggle and self-denial through the ages. If this is the voice of science, no hope is to be found there for the higher life of man.

Only Christ can control and master and set to noble uses the forces Christ has released. That is the deep conviction of every true Christian, and the mind and heart of the world seems to be turning in its direction more and more. Modern science has come to stay. That does not mean that all its present conclusions and hypotheses will be justified, or that they will remain unchallenged. "Our little systems have their day, and cease to be" in science and philosophy no less than in theology. But we shall go on, not back, for the basic principles on which modern science has worked with such amazing results thus far are part of the everlasting rock of truth. The scientific spirit and method will last as long as the material world endures.

Is it then presumptuous to assert that the faith destined surely to mastery over the future is a faith able to live with modern science on terms of mutual respect

and hearty co-operation? Any form of religion which meets this modern world with nothing but distrust for its truths and processes and mighty affirmations, any religion that hides itself away in sanctuaries while the mighty world of modern thought and activity goes roaring on its way outside, must be content to be simply a haven of refuge for those driven by the uproar to flee for relief to a blind and irrational faith. In such an age authoritarian Christianity can be no more than a life-saving service, stationed along the shores of wild seas of thought and feeling and action, to pick up those who have lost heart and given up the struggle, when what is urgently needed is an intrepid Christianity that can master the waves and brave the storms and provide the spiritual life of men safe and sure passage on and over that sea, bringing them at last to their haven in the commonwealth of God.

There is little or nothing to be expected from the humanitarian type of religion. In order to meet and prove more than a match for the sins and perils, the facts and forces, of our present world, "A God must mingle in the game." Human nature is not strong enough in itself. It is a critical time, a time for crying out to God who alone can save in so needy a day; time for "taking the whole armor of God," for the fight is no wrestling match, but a life-and-death struggle with the "powers of this age."

"Thou ship of earth, with death and birth and life and sex aboard;
And fires of desires burning hotly in the hold;
I fear thee, oh, I fear thee, for I hear the tongue and sword
At battle on the deck, and the wild mutineers are bold.

The dewdrop morn may fall from off the petal of the sky;
But all the deck is wet with blood, and stains the crystal red;
A pilot, God! A pilot! for the helm is left awry;
And the best sailors in the ship lie there among the dead."

The only saving power the world has ever known is religion. The Christian is very sure that the only power that can save the world today is the religion of Christ, the Christ Who is living in our life today. He is the one pilot. And we need to see Him, not only later when we cross the bar, but now. The liberal Christian is sure that the most potent form of Christianity today, in which lies the best and most reasonable hope of salvation for the world, is liberal Christianity, the religion of the spirit, a free, fearless faith in the God whom Jesus reveals as the great Reality in and back of the world in which we live. This faith alone can fulfill the wonderful prophecy of one of its noblest expounders, that the creation, looking expectantly for the revealing of the sons of God, shall at last be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the sons of God (Romans viii. 19).

This world of today will cling to modern science. It follows that the form of religion that will best meet its needs and save it from its dangers and sins will be a religion that honors and frankly adopts the spirit and method of modern science. And it is simple matter of fact that Christianity is the only religion that has made, or is making, any serious attempt to adapt itself to modern science. Liberal Christianity is that form of Christianity which is adapting itself to modern thought, and this makes it the religious hope of the world.

The modern world believes in letting men know the

truth. Indeed it believes that it is not permanently possible to keep men from knowing the truth and that the fuller their knowledge, and the more rapidly they can attain it, the more hope there is for mankind.

The Church of Christ can exert its full influence over the world of our day only by giving full recognition to the rights of scientific study, and to the beauty of knowledge. Society as a whole has passed the point where it is possible for authorities of any sort, political or ecclesiastical, to set bounds to what men should try to know. The net result of attempted interference on the part of religious bodies with the processes of public education, and of the theological dogmatism of the past, is: the general conviction that religion must be rigidly ruled out from our systems of public education, and an increasing neglect of religion as an element in all our educational processes, both public and private.

Yet there are signs of an awakening to the danger lurking in this neglect of moral and religious training in our educational processes. Thus far it has spent itself largely on pleas to the home and the Church to supply what the school fails to do. But some educators and some other leaders of civic and social life are also beginning to show an interest in the difficult question how the public schools and the colleges and universities can provide moral and religious training without succumbing to the perils of sectarianism or endangering true freedom of thought and expression. Keen observers of the present situation have for some time thought that ere long the colleges may have to take into their own hands the matter of devising forms of religious belief and practice for their students, independently of what

the Churches might hold or urge. Should the present sectarian strife and ecclesiastical narrowness become much more rampant, reducing the Churches thereby to an even more helpless and hopeless condition of inability to provide religious leadership and inspiration to the universities, the universities may be forced to work out their own independent developments of religious faith and practice. It would be unfortunate to have such a divorce occur between college and Church; but it would be still more unfortunate for our colleges to continue a "hands off" policy while Church bodies attack or disparage modern knowledge, and otherwise show their lack of capacity for genuine co-operation with our modern institutions of learning. There was a time when the universities led in the development of theological thought; and it was a time of noble progress in Christian thinking.

There has been much complaint in Church circles over the fact that so many of our choice college-bred young men and young women are out of touch with the Church, and indisposed to invest their time and talents in the means and opportunities of service which the Church offers. It has been generally assumed that the colleges and universities are wholly at fault by reason of the irreligious or non-religious character of their teaching. We have heard much talk about our "godless" colleges. I believe that many, if not most, of those Churchmen who have come close to college boys and girls in the last score of years would agree with me in the judgment that the fault lies with the Churches far more than with the schools. There are faults in the colleges, serious faults. There are too many men and

women in positions of influence, particularly in faculties of philosophy and science, who exhibit a careless, or even an antagonistic, attitude toward religion. The Church has a right to ask that steps be taken to correct such a condition in any college. Exactly as no one would be tolerated in any teaching position who did not thoroughly respect the scientific method and spirit, so no one should be tolerated in any teaching position who does not respect the religious spirit. We are advocating no infringement of academic freedom. In the one case, as in the other, the good and defensible reason for this insistence is that the scientific spirit and the religious spirit are both essential to the making of a good citizen.

But far more of the fault than can be justly laid at the door of the colleges lies back in the Churches. We bring up boys and girls in a faith that cannot possibly live on good terms with modern science; we shirk the real living questions that they must soon meet; then we send them to schools where all the teaching is based on modern science, and expect them, while struggling with a bewildering mass of new knowledge that comes upon them, to work out for themselves some sort of principle of compromise or accommodation, whereby their religious faith may live on, intact and strong, quite apart from what they learn to be the truth about the world in which they live. It is amazingly inconsistent the way in which the most rigid upholders of reactionary theology will eagerly send their children to the "best" schools and colleges, *i.e.*, those institutions where the highest standard of scientific instruction obtains. If modern science is wrong, pernicious, misleading, why do they not send these precious young souls to institu-

tions which still cling to ancient forms and ways and dogmas in all the subjects taught?

Not only must youths go through this painful process of adjustments that will not stay adjusted between the crude and old-fashioned religious tradition previously taught them in their homes and Churches and the new knowledge to which they are introduced in the college halls; but in many cases, after these years of intellectual growth and enlightenment, they must return to a Church that still clings to beliefs that clash with what their keen young minds have found to be true elsewhere; and too often to an atmosphere of suspicion toward their different point of view. Not a few cases have come to my personal knowledge, of young men and young women returning to their home Churches after college years, and offering their services in the work of the Sunday School and church, only to be treated with distrust, or to be required to teach views impossible for anyone to teach who has accepted the scientific view of facts. And, in all such cases, the good people of the Church lament the bad influence of the godless college that has corrupted, as they explain it to themselves, the pure and simple faith of the youth. They might as well blame the college for the fact that the youth has outgrown his little-boy clothes.

If our boys and girls are to be sent to colleges and schools where modern science is the basis of the teaching, it is not too much to demand that they shall be made ready before they go by facing fearlessly and naturally, in their Sunday School training and in the sermons they hear, the facts of modern scientific knowledge. A Church understandingly sympathetic with the

mind and heart of youth, and frank in its dealing with all facts and questions, can retain its hold on its young people through the difficult period of study and growth, and make sure that there will be in their case no disastrous break between religion and knowledge.

"To hold knowledge and religion together"—that is the special order of business of our time, as foreseen by a wise leader of some years ago. Is it not evident that liberal Christianity is best equipped for the task of avoiding a split between religious knowledge and other knowledge? A religion which believes that all knowledge belongs to God, and so to the children of God, and that none of it therefore is unwholesome fare for the soul of man; which fearlessly faces facts, and adapts its systems to them; which patiently yet eagerly works to effect a sound and thorough adjustment between modern thought and the unchangeable principles and ideals and spiritual experiences of the Christian life—such a movement can hold knowledge and religion together. Do the champions of authoritarian religion actually expect to prevent the spread of knowledge, or force it to fit into the mold of their inherited dogmas? Do they really think that the welfare of religion can be advanced by legislation forbidding the teaching of modern ideas that upset ancient thoughts of God and the world? Is it not very plain to perceive that a religion which is afraid of modern thought, and cannot or will not allow its truths to be re-expressed in modern categories, is entering on a hopeless contest with the present age? The modern world is committed to the fullest cultivation and pursuit of education. The only religion that can appeal to it, or live respected and dominant in it, is a religion which

fosters investigation and gives it free rein, not a religion that fears and restricts it. For the sake alike of the colleges and of the Churches, and for the sake of the soul and society of man, we must work out a cordial relationship between the college and the Church, between man's best knowledge and his highest faith. That means that only a Christianity in harmony with modern ways of thinking has any real chance. Liberal Christianity is the religious hope of the world.

The modern world trusts also in *democracy*. Less is being said on this theme than was said a few years ago. The word was then overworked, and it is natural that it should take a vacation. But the lessened use of the word does not mean that faith in democracy has grown less in the human heart.

An age committed to democracy will not respond very readily to any form of absolutism in religion. Authoritarianism, in either of its forms, has lost its hold upon it. The modern world must have a religion which makes its primary appeal to the common religious sense of mankind. Any faith which sets before men presuppositions which must be blindly accepted before that faith can function, makes little appeal to the mind of our time. We must have, in a very real though somewhat limited sense, a Christianity content to rest its power on the suffrages of mankind. That does not mean, of course, anything so absurd as that men shall ever come to vote what shall be believed as Christian truth, the majority to rule. Liberal Christians certainly do not understand it to mean anything so impossible. But it does mean to them that the ultimate decision as to what is authoritative in religion, as in music, must be cheer-

fully, fearlessly, left to the judgment of our common humanity. The appeal must always be to "every man's conscience in the sight of God," the same arbiter to which Paul appealed. Science rests on the conviction that once facts and the process of their establishment are set before intelligent public opinion, they will be accepted. It is sure that the unspoiled mind of man is ultimately capable of recognizing the truth. Religion must be made to rest on a similar basis. It must be quite sure that the soul of man is capable ultimately of recognizing the truth about God and the soul. It is here that liberal Christianity takes its stand in contrast to authoritarianism which calls for submission to dogmas that are independent of the human soul and conscience for their authority. The divine right of creeds cannot survive in a day that has done with the divine right of kings. The Protestant principle that authority is found in the Word of God interpreted by the private judgment of the individual soul illumined by the Spirit of God, is the principle on which liberal Christianity stands. It is the only principle of religious authority that can function well in an age devoted to democracy. Liberal Christianity is the religious hope of the present age.

The third dominant idea of our time is *unity*. There is an irresistible tide and tendency at work in our world making toward co-operation, getting together. Every serious movement of any importance must deal with universals, must become a world movement. One of the deeply felt needs that men are depending upon religion to supply is the need of a unifying power. More and more leading men are asserting that there is little or no hope of enduring peace, small chance for success in

connection with the League of Nations, or any other world-organization, unless some common spiritual basis can be found. Christianity alone, among the religions of the world, shows any promise of proving to be such a unifying force of faith. But it is quite useless to hope that the faith that unifies can ever be provided by any sectarian movement, any particularistic form of Church.

Christianity, in its dogmatic phases, insistent on particular doctrines or practices, has invariably been a divisive, not a unifying force in the life of the world. It is sadly true that unbelievers are able to say, with some color of plausibility, that on the whole Christianity has been a separating and divisive influence. Only when, and as, the great principles and ideals of Christ shall be made supreme—the ideals of love, service, sacrifice, freedom, and faith in Christ as the revealer of God, of man, and of God in man—will Christianity prove able to unify. It is becoming increasingly evident that there is no hope of attaining unity among the various branches of the Church on any basis of a common creed, or a common order. Unity must be set up on a basis of common service, and common spiritual experience. A Church large-hearted enough to say with Paul: "Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in uncorruptness"; "No one can call Jesus Lord but in the Holy Spirit"; "The greatest of these is love" —may hold before itself the goal of unity, and so far attain it as to prove the powerful unifying force the world so sorely needs.

The objection is sometimes urged that the unity of which the liberal Christian talks, and for which he

pleads, is in fact altogether too vague, evidence of an indifference to truth and willingness to brush aside honest differences, and would leave nothing real in the way of conviction on which to unite. This is utterly untrue to the facts. The liberal Christian is sure that in all the world there is nothing so certain, so lasting amid all outward changes, so abiding and sound as a basis of unity, as is the spiritual experience of the soul with God. Loyalty to the Person, Jesus Christ, is a far better and firmer basis of united faith and action than is any measure of intellectual agreement in defining that Personality.

There could hardly be a more egregious error than to suppose that when the liberal Christian pleads for unity on the basis of the great essentials of Christian experience, and for large liberty on matters connected with the intellectual formulation and expression of such essential experiences, he is an apostle of religious indifferentism, or is pleading for a false peace maintained through a self-stultifying silence. Nowhere in the whole theological world will you find anyone more eager to provide for the full presentation of differing views, more ready for the grapple of mind with mind, more full of the joy of good-natured but earnest discussion of varying conceptions of truth, than you find among liberal Christians. But this is what distinguishes the liberal Christian always from the authoritarian—that he wants to make certain of "a fair field and no favor" for varying and competing views. He has no faith in ecclesiastical process as a means of establishing truth. He does not seek to make a desert by driving out of the Church those who hold other views and calling it a victory. He

wants full liberty of expression, for he is confident that the truth does not need adventitious aids to win.

The authoritarian avers that the liberal Christian is indifferent about truth. The liberal Christian replies that he is so vitally concerned about truth that he cannot consent to any restriction on the free and full search for it. He is sure also that all the time men are searching freely by intellectual hard labor to improve their grasp of truth, they can live together and work together in a real unity on the basis of a common spiritual experience, and a common faith in great, present, spiritual realities. That way lies real unity. All other ways are delusive, or crooked, or hopeless.

No one vitally interested in the salvation of humanity, who believes in Christ as the Savior, can look to the East, and watch what is going on in the ancient empires of Asia, without a strange thrill. He is at once appalled, daunted, excited, allured. How can these awakening millions be brought to see Christ and His salvation? There is not a shadow of doubt that they will be drawn into the full tide of modern scientific thinking.

Eagerly they are reaching out to appropriate all the knowledge and technical skill that the Western world can offer. With it goes to them much of the agnostic and materialistic philosophy that has sprung up here in the Western world along with this development of modern science. It comes to them with a certain prestige, and they are lacking in the antidotes supplied by the highly ethical religion that Christendom has inherited. Can this crisis be met by a religion of authority, by a Christianity that holds itself aloof from the very knowledge which the Orient is eagerly seizing? It is

tragic, to see the strength of the determination in some quarters to hold these awakening peoples in leading strings, to burden them with the weight of our past theological bickerings and misunderstandings, to summon them to the defense of doctrines that have no real relation to their living experience, under the assurance solemnly given by pious but narrow souls that Christianity is essentially one with some particular phase of belief, identified with a single sect or party; and to warn them that Christianity and modern thinking are incompatible. It was pathetic in the extreme, a few months ago, to observe Bertrand Russell on the one hand and certain fundamentalist visitors on the other, agreeing in the message to Chinese students that they could not hold to both modern science and Christianity, but must choose between them. One of the ablest teachers in a Christian college in China recently confessed, out of great depression of spirit, the painful contrast which made itself felt on passing from the department of science to the theological department in the same institution—the glad, free, buoyant, confident spirit of eager search for truth in the one; the suspicious, narrow, cramped, defensive spirit in the other.

The liberal Christian wishes the study of religion and theology carried on with the same freedom, the same generous courtesy, the same readiness to honor original thinking, the same confidence in the ability of truth to get itself recognized, the same absence of force, the same childlikeness of spirit, the same good comradeship of all honest souls, that characterize the conduct of scientific research at its best. Religion pursued in such a magnanimous atmosphere would turn into a unifying

force. It would be, as no substitute kind of religion could be, truly and deeply Christian. Once again, in one more sphere of modern interest, liberal Christianity is the religious hope of the world.

But, in saying this, there is an admission to be made, and a serious challenge to be offered. This is the admission that in speaking of liberal Christianity as the religious hope of the world, we have in mind liberal Christianity as it might be and ought to be, rather than as it is. Liberal Christianity is not yet capable of discharging this great function. It still carries with it too much of an academic spirit and atmosphere, too little of the spirit of a divine mission. It displays too great a tendency to emphasize the word "liberal" rather than the greater word "Christianity."

If our stand be well taken that a world so desperately needing salvation must look to a liberal form of Christianity as its best hope, then how tremendous is the challenge to those who call themselves liberal Christians to play well their part, to awaken to the full consciousness and realization of their saving mission. Liberal Christianity must become, not a theological diversion, but a saving mission; not a course of lectures, but a crusade. Liberals do well to ask themselves very seriously whether the mistrust felt toward them and their views on the part of large numbers of Christians the Church over, is not in some part deserved, by too plain evidence of a lack of passion and devotion in their allegiance to the cause of the salvation of man and his world.

"Awake to righteousness, and sin not; for some have not the knowledge of God; I speak this to your shame." "We know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth

in wickedness. And we know that the Son of God is come and hath given us a knowledge of Him that is true." We must make the great surrender to the urge that finds strong expression in such words if we really intend to be worthy of our mission.

It is fitting that the last words of an exposition of "liberal Christianity" should be in the nature of a challenge and a call addressed to all who espouse that form of the Christian religion. We can make up our minds none too soon to address ourselves to the question how we may fulfill this function, what is necessary in order that we may meet the need of the world. How can liberal Christianity prove the saving force which its nature fits it to be?

First of all, there must ever be in us the right spirit. There is no other way. That form of Christianity which shows most evidently the presence and power of the spirit of Christ will ultimately win the confidence of all men. No degree of intellectual superiority, real or assumed, no brilliancy of thought or persuasiveness of words, will prove to have sufficient power in themselves to win true and final approval. The weapons that will bring victory are still those Paul displayed when he opened his armory: "In everything commending ourselves as ministers of God, in much patience, in pureness, in knowledge, in long-suffering [which is simply old English for "good temper"], in kindness, in the Holy Spirit, in love unfeigned, in the word of truth, in the power of God; by the armor of righteousness on the right hand and on the left."

Liberal Christianity must be "filled with the spirit," if it is to be equal to its divinely appointed task. It is

of undeniably real importance to be theologically correct; but it is immensely more so to be spiritually sound. The distinguishing marks of the liberal Christian ministry must be spiritual fervor, moral power, saving passion. We must learn how to be popular, positive, impassioned, rather than critical, highbrow, and academic. There has been too much water and too little fire about our liberal Christianity. Too often we have been in the true line of succession with those men of the first century, who "knew only the baptism of John."

We must be on fire with faith and enthusiasm for our Gospel. Our function, as has always been the function of the Church, is to bring God to men and men to God. We have a Gospel wonderfully able to supply the one thing lacking in the life of the present world. If liberal Christianity finds a way to use to the full its dormant capabilities, the Christian message of salvation will be given to the world "in spirit and in reality," with a power hitherto never experienced.

To speak the plain truth, Protestantism has never yet had, in its official theology, a God good enough to match its experience of grace. In Luther, Calvin, Knox, Wesley, and the rest, the experience of God's saving grace was infinitely superior to the words in which they described it. Protestantism will never have a God good enough to match its experience of grace until it exercises the courage to find its God wholly, really, sufficiently, daringly, in Jesus Christ. That is the God whom liberal Christianity is struggling and striving to express. We need a new transfiguration experience, like to that of the three disciples, in which we shall "see no man

save Jesus only''; a spirit and mind in which we can truly say ''For us there is but One God, the Father; and One Lord, Jesus Christ.''

If, as we believe, our liberal faith is better and truer than the faith held by humanitarians on the one hand, and authoritarians on the other, we can prove it so, not by any intellectual superiority, real or pretended, but by evidencing its superabounding moral and spiritual excellence. It will not do to criticize the positions taken by fundamentalists, and stop there. We must show them better ways to the ends they seek. We must not content ourselves with setting forth the dangerous errors contained in the doctrine of an inerrant Bible; we must go on and positively commend the real Bible to men as the practical guidebook for religious experience, authenticated by the Spirit that speaks in and through it. We must not be content to deprecate the importance of the doctrine of the virgin birth of our Lord. We must present a Christ so divine that a miraculous birth shall seem neither strange nor necessary, but simply an incident, a particular view to be calmly discussed, while our whole souls go out to Him in adoration and trust. We must see in Christ no ''spiritual Apollo,'' but the One in fellowship with whom is the only hope of salvation from sin, the sin of individuals and the sin of the world. We must couple inseparably with our indifference as to the form of His resurrection a deep and joyous certainty of His living presence, and of the reality of the hope of eternal life. We must not only bear our testimony very clearly to the childishness and unspirituality of premillennial views; we must, also,

pass on to men a triumphant and completely satisfying alternative answer to that longing which has in every age given life to apocalypticism, the longing of the soul of man to know beyond a peradventure that it is not part of a closed order, that we are not caught in a mechanical process, that nothing is too good to come true, that a Personal God may always be eagerly looked to for unpredictable things. We belong to the company of those who have learned to "expect great things from God," as well as to "attempt great things for God." Our God, the God revealed in Jesus Christ, is not caged in the universe, helplessly entangled in the implacable grinding of His own system of laws and forces. The Christian believer should always be on the tiptoe of expectancy. He is to march on, breast forward, as though the Kingdom of God might meet him right around the next turn of the road. That is the great spiritual truth at the heart of the apocalyptic spirit and message in every age.

Worse than any bondage to old forms of theology is bondage to a mechanistic view of life. Christ is fully able to deliver us from that bondage. Our Gospel must make this known to the ends of the earth.

It is in such corrective ways that we must meet the mistaken views and emphases of those who hold to reactionary theology; not relying chiefly on criticism, but chiefly depending on winning their good will by plain pointing out of better ways than theirs to the very ends they seek.

We have a better Gospel than any proclaimed since New Testament times, simpler, more real, more vitally related to the God who was and is in Jesus. It demon-

strates how men can be saved by personal fellowship with the Living God. It demonstrates how the world can be saved by seeking first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness. If only that Gospel were proclaimed with the same passion with which Peter the Hermit preached his infinitely smaller crusade; with the same kind of passion which evangelists of the cruder sort used to put into the preaching of their poorer Gospel. Christ would come to His own, and the world would come back to the Father.

One of the leaders of liberal Christianity has well said:

> The theories of atonement of Irenæus and of Anselm were serious attempts to account for the experience of salvation which men had with Christ and in His Church; but after all no theory is quite adequate to explain this supreme fact of human life. Perchance God became man that Jesus might show us the Father —Him whom Philip asked to see. When men behold Him, in the face and the life, in the words, the deeds, and the death of Jesus, they will arise and go to Him. Then they are saved—saved by infinite grace casting its arms around the hopeless sinner.

Still does the test apply with the multitude—"The God that answers by fire, let Him be God." May God send upon the ministry of liberal Christians the fire of His Spirit, that the everlasting Gospel may be proclaimed in our day in tones that will penetrate to the heart of the people! It is a great thing to know the truth that can make us free. But we need something more also. We need heat as well as light. We need to

cry out to the God of all grace, who has brought us to the kingdom for such a time as this:

"Grant us Thy truth to make us free;
And kindling hearts that burn for Thee;
Till all Thy living altars claim
One holy light, one heavenly flame."

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